Leadership-Influenced Practices that Impact Classroom Instruction Related to Writing: A Case Study of a Successful Elementary School

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LEADERSHIP-INFLUENCED PRACTICES THAT IMPACT CLASSROOM INSTRUCTION RELATED TO WRITING: A CASE STUDY OF A SUCCESSFUL ELEMENTARY SCHOOL

by

Barb Johnson

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Louann Bierlein Palmer, Advisor

Western Michigan University
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LEADERSHIP-INFLUENCED PRACTICES THAT IMPACT CLASSROOM INSTRUCTION RELATED TO WRITING: A CASE STUDY OF A SUCCESSFUL ELEMENTARY SCHOOL

Barb Johnson, Ph.D.
Western Michigan University, 2007

This research studied the practices of educators at an ethnically diverse suburban elementary school which had demonstrated success in the area of student writing, even among at-risk students. The overall research goal was to examine to what extent and how leadership-related practices impacted classroom instruction in a manner that helped produce successful writing scores. A case study approach was used to explore four key leadership-related practices (supervision, curriculum, professional development, and knowledgeable leaders) and their impact on classroom literacy-based instructional strategies.

The study participants included two leaders and fourteen teachers from a single elementary school located in a metropolitan Michigan community. To collect and analyze opinions of leader and teacher behaviors, sixteen interviews were conducted. Qualitative coding techniques were used to develop common themes/categories of information.

Analysis of the data provided two dominant categories that teacher participants viewed as significant factors in her or his ability to successfully teach writing: the influence of leadership practices and the impact of instructional strategies. In reference to the influence of leadership practices, teachers indicated they
were impacted in four primary ways: (1) persistent supervision and materials supported a coherent literacy program; (2) curriculum was clarified through discussion and report card alignment; (3) the leaders provided continuous professional development on the literacy framework that was focused, modeled, and shared; and (4) leaders were knowledgeable about the instructional methods they sought. In reference to impact of instructional strategies, two major areas emerged: (1) a framework organized strategies into a cohesive program; and (2) this framework defined the roles of phonics, guided reading, self-selected reading, and writing instruction in producing effective writers.

Overall, this study supports previous research on this topic in that if a coherent literacy framework is supported through the leaders' supervision; its foundation is a comprehensive curriculum; and the leaders, as well as teachers, become knowledgeable of the framework through professional development, then classroom instruction will be influenced and students will experience quality writing instruction. The findings from this study further add to the literature base by providing a deeper understanding of how leaders can impact classroom instruction.
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CHAPTER I: INTRODUCTION

Background

Since the No Child Left Behind Act (NCLB) was enacted in 2001, there is a greater focus on accountability for educators. The issue of low writing scores in particular has received a great deal of attention from state education officials, school boards and parents. Indeed in 2005, only 51.5% of third graders succeeded in passing the writing component of the Michigan Educational Assessment Program (MEAP). Educators are seeking ways to engage and effectively instruct a generation of children reared in a rapidly changing world on forty-plus hours a week of media amusement, where writing plays no role (Daggett, 2001; Simpson, 2006).

Numerous reasons exist as to why low writing test scores legitimately concern public educators, institutions and individuals. Students who do not engage with rigorous writing curriculum or instruction will not likely enter college or succeed in college (Marzano, 2004; Wagner, et al., 2006). In response, state leaders, such as Governor Granholm and Representative Ehlers of Michigan, note that their state, in particular, needs a more educated work force as it transforms from an industrialized economy to a knowledge-based one (Cherry, 2006; Flanagan, 2005; Golder, 2006; VandeBunte, 2005).

Demonstrating the importance of a college degree, while Michigan overall is losing jobs, one of its cities, Ann Arbor, added 1,600 jobs in 2005 and was chosen as the new base for Google. This was primarily due to the education level of the population: 69% are college educated in the over-25 age group in Ann Arbor compared with 24% nationwide (Karush, 2006). On an individual level, not being
able to write well has significance for the reason that one might not finish college. In 2003, the U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics reported those who do not receive a college degree had a median weekly salary of $554, compared to $900 for those with a college degree (Connelly & Schultz, 2005).

Since writing ability is essential to attaining a college degree, state policymakers utilize state test results like the MEAP scores as the means to hold leaders and classrooms accountable for helping students obtain writing skills (Canul, 2006). The perceived competency of schools, school districts, administrators and educators is therefore heavily based on such assessments (Cherry, 2006).

In this climate, it is not surprising that there has been much research and many recommendations offered regarding effective leadership-influenced practices that impact classroom instruction and, in turn, student outcomes. One of the leading authors on this topic is Marzano (2003), who reviewed hundreds of research studies related to effective leadership to pull together a coherent set of recommended strategies. At the school level, Marzano cites the leader’s role as critical for establishing the goals, mission, climate of the school and classrooms, attitudes of teachers, classroom practices of teachers, organization of curriculum and instruction, and opportunities for students to learn. In addition, it is essential for a school’s improvement and achievement. At the classroom level, Marzano found effectiveness was based upon a teacher’s instructional strategies, classroom management and curriculum design, all impacted by the leadership practices within the broader organization.
Very little, however, has been done to closely examine the connection between the implementation of such recommended leadership practices and their role in helping teachers make changes in the classroom which lead to improved student achievement scores (Schmoker, 2006). And just as important as empirical scores on a single test is how such leadership practices might lead to on-going instructional improvement practices within the classroom. Let’s examine some theory related to that issue.

Reeves’ Theory on Connecting Leaders and Instruction

In response to the policy push for more accountability, many theories and recommendations have been offered related to improved leadership and/or instructional practices. One such theory of particular interest for this study is that of Reeves’ (2004) theory of student-centered accountability. It draws from Marzano’s (2003) work on school effectiveness. Student-centered accountability is an idea that not only focuses on collecting data, but also attempts to understand student achievement scores with information relating to at least four indicators: (1) a leader’s supervision, (2) the comprehensiveness of the curriculum being used, (3) teaching practices supported by professional development, and (4) the leader’s knowledge of curriculum and instruction. Reeves’ overall theory of student-centered accountability provides a context for test scores, is constructive as it focuses on the improvement of teaching and learning, and is motivational to teachers because it includes mechanisms which can be directly influenced by teachers.

As one component, Reeves posited that leadership supervision must be a strong component of a student-centered accountability system. Such supervision
involves leaders' examining their buildings' practices and supervising the connection of those practices to student achievement. This might involve supervision practices such as having the leader visit each classroom daily to observe what is being taught and recognizing teacher best practices at staff meetings.

A second key component within a student-centered accountability system is that the leaders must be committed to implementing a comprehensive curriculum, particularly in the core basic subjects such as reading, writing and math. As part of their supervision practices, the leaders examine if state standards, such as Grade Level Content Expectations (GLCEs), are actually being taught. For example, one well-known comprehensive structure for literacy instruction that covers the GLCEs at the elementary level involves a balanced framework entitled Four Blocks (Cunningham & Hall, 1998). Within a student-centered accountability model, leaders ascertain whether or not the students are able to master grade-level curriculum expectations. This would be evident through the use of rubrics within the curriculum, and, if not, support would be provided to the teachers and students as needed to accomplish this goal.

In addition, a third aspect of Reeves' theory implies greater success via student-centered accountability when educators are philosophically congruent with, and well versed in the use of best practices. This occurs when leaders make teachers' successes the focal point of strong professional development and teachers are involved in the planning of such professional development activities. This might be evidenced through direct support of teachers as they implement the practices supported by research and learned through professional development.
Finally, as a fourth piece, Reeves notes that leaders themselves must be knowledgeable regarding curriculum, instruction, and assessment. For example, the leaders' discussions at faculty meetings must focus on student achievement as well as instructional practices. In addition, contacts with parent are initiated due to academic achievement or lack thereof.

Reeves' theory is used within this study to closely examine how the implementation of recommended leadership-influenced practices might lead to improved student achievement scores. When parents, community leaders, board members, administrators, and teachers comprehend the context of accountability, they can appreciate the meaning of the numbers found in the educational box scores on the front page of the newspaper.

Problem Statement

As previously mentioned, since No Child Left Behind, a push for effective leaders and classrooms has occurred in public schools over the last number of years. Much research has focused on effective leadership practices, yet a number of research gaps as identified through the literature remain. These include a need to better understand how leadership-based practices can impact student outcomes, especially in the area of writing, including at-risk students.

First, Reeves' theory of how various types of leadership practices can impact the classroom comes from his significant research at the Center for Performance Assessment (Reeves, 2004). The author himself calls for application of his theory of student-centered accountability, citing the need to closely examine how the implementation of various best-practice, leadership-influenced practices actually
impacts the work done within the classroom (Reeves, 2004). Others also call for more single institution-focused studies centering on leadership practice and classroom connections (e.g., Elmore, 2000; Fielding et al., 2004; Fullan, 2003; Johnson, 2005; King & Newmann, 2000). Although some studies (e.g., Allen, 2006) have discovered that leaders and teachers in a building who focus on professional learning can make student achievement rise, how that is achieved is still not understood. There is a need to study the connections from the perspective of leaders and teachers who have demonstrated responsibility for student success, which in turn will extend current knowledge regarding leader-influenced student accountability outcomes (Elmore, 2000; Snow, Burns, & Griffin, 1998; Wagner, et al., 2006).

Second, there are specific gaps in the research identified through the literature related to how effective leadership might lead to successful writing outcomes within a given school. A large number of studies have determined that effective writing instruction entails modeling, an opportunity to write, conferencing, and sharing (e.g., Atwell, 1998; Bromley, 1998, 2002; Cambourne, 1988; Graves, 1995; Kane, 1997; Peterson, 2000; Routman, 2005; Shanahan, 1997; Vygotsky, 1978). In addition, literacy instruction involves using the phonic approach (Allington & Cunningham, 1996), whereby children learn their letters and how to sound out the letters of words, as well as the basal reader, with its emphasis on sight words and comprehension (Allington & Cunningham, 1996) and the trade book curriculum (Veatch, 1959), which connects reading to writing. However, a less frequent approach has been to study the actions of educators as they implement a model of literacy instruction, with
such authors calling for more research in this area (George, Moley, & Ogle, 1992; Henk & Moore, 1992; Vacca, Vacca, & Bruneau, 1997).

Finally, much of the previous research examining the implementation of a comprehensive curriculum has not included at-risk students in their studies, and the few that have included such variables focused on singular classrooms (Schmoker, 2006), as opposed to school-wide efforts. Since supervision, curriculum, and professional development have been shown to impact students at risk (Reeves, 2004), the examination of these variables will allow findings to be drawn from more diverse educational environments (Schmoker, 2006; Strickland, Ganske, & Monroe, 2002).

Research Questions

To help fill current research gaps, I examined a school that has implemented four key recommended leadership practices (systematic supervision, comprehensive instruction, professional development, and knowledgeable leaders), and has experienced success in its writing scores, even for at-risk students. Per Reeves' theory, one could assume that such leadership practices helped cause the improved student writing scores. I wanted to examine that assumption to find out to what extent and how such leadership practices are connected to selected classroom teachers in a manner that helped produce successful results as measured by state writing assessments.

The overall research goal was to examine the practices utilized by the educators within a given school, where even at-risk students are doing well in the subject of writing, in addition to other subjects. With that goal in mind, the following research questions were developed and served as the magnifying glass for this study:
1) Within an elementary school that has experienced significant increases in its students' writing scores (including at-risk student sub-populations), to what extent and how do teachers and leaders believe the following leadership-related practices influenced those results:
   a. systemic supervision;
   b. comprehensive curriculum;
   c. supported professional development of curriculum, instruction, and assessment; and
   d. the leaders' knowledge of curriculum, instruction and assessment?

2) Within an elementary school that has attempted to implement such leadership-influenced practices,
   a. what key barriers were encountered; and
   b. what strategies were utilized for overcoming such barriers?

3) Within an elementary school that has experienced significant increases in its students' writing scores (including at-risk student sub-populations), to what extent and how do teachers and leaders believe the following literacy-based instructional practices influenced those results:
   a. phonics instruction;
   b. guided reading including basal;
   c. self-selected reading of trade books; and
   d. writing instruction?

4) Within an elementary school that has attempted to implement such classroom instructional practices,
a. what key barriers were encountered; and

b. what strategies were utilized for overcoming such barriers?

Methodology

Due to the subject matter and context of this study, I employed a qualitative approach. The research took place at an ethnically diverse suburban elementary school, a natural setting wherein specific leadership practices were implemented and specific improvements within student writing scores occurred. As a result, a qualitative methodology was appropriate, given the use of a purposeful sampling and a collection of open-ended data (Creswell, 2003).

Furthermore, due to the goals, limitations and focus of this study, I implemented a case study approach. This qualitative framework was suitable because it has been utilized in an assortment of settings, including education (Tesch, 1988). The study participants in this research had all experienced the same leaders, similar understanding of student-accountability and training of a comprehensive curriculum, as well as school improvement goals. In addition, the study participants all shared this common experience at an elementary school with at-risk students as defined by income level. Another commonality is that, in working with at-risk students in all grade levels, the teachers utilized similar lessons, assessments and student monitoring, and their at-risk students exceeded expectations in writing, regardless of grade level.

In-depth interviews with 16 teachers and leaders were conducted in an attempt to further understand the experiences of these educators and the degree to which, and how, the leadership impacted their ability to help all students, even those at risk, to be
successful in writing. Artifacts were examined, including the School Improvement Plan, and checklists of instructional strategies that were used. The form used for the leader's evaluations of teachers was studied as well as professional development opportunities.

Summary

This research studies the leadership-influenced practices that appear to have connected leaders and classrooms in a school and resulted in high levels of writing for their students, including those identified at risk of failure. Through the use of a case study, the researcher examined the experiences of teachers who used a comprehensive curriculum, experienced systematic supervision, were involved in professional development processes and activities, and worked with leaders who indicated they were well versed in curriculum, instruction and assessment. This information is significant because it explores the connections between the implementation of recommended leadership practices and classroom teachers as the teachers work to enhance their students' writing scores through the use of effective writing instructional practices.

The remainder of this dissertation includes the following: a review of the literature in Chapter Two, a discussion of the methodology utilized in Chapter Three, research findings in Chapter Four, and conclusions and suggestions for further research in Chapter Five.
CHAPTER II: REVIEW OF RELATED LITERATURE

Introduction

Since the Michigan Educational Assessment Program was first implemented in 1970, much has been written concerning the importance of writing instruction for an educated Michigan citizenry. This state has placed increased importance on becoming college educated, while at the same time school leaders and classroom teachers have experienced frustration in developing successful writers who can gain college admission and succeed once enrolled (Schmoker, 2006). This chapter examines the prominent theories of *leadership-influenced practices that effectively impact classroom instruction*. Specific attention is paid to Douglas Reeves’ (2004) theory on connecting leader practices and classroom teachers. Studies examining his theory are reviewed, focusing on main leadership practices: (1) leadership supervision, (2) a comprehensive curriculum, (3) strong professional development, and (4) leaders with knowledge of curriculum, instruction and assessment.

Students who do not have a rigorous writing curriculum or instruction will not likely enter or succeed in college (Marzano, 2003; Wagner, et al., 2006). Therefore, this chapter also examines the most prominent theories of *classroom instruction related to writing literacy*: phonics, basal, trade book and writer’s workshop, with specific attention paid to the comprehensive *Four Blocks* framework, which includes all four components. The chapter concludes by identifying institutional settings that have received limited attention in previous research of schools with successful writing scores. It provides a framework for reviewing the implementation of a
comprehensive writing curriculum by leaders and teachers in a school that has a measurable at-risk population.

Connecting Leadership Practices and Classroom Instruction

A number of studies have examined the impact on teachers when new programs, such as those requiring certain effective strategies, are implemented. Some educators commit to the strategies proposed by their leaders and the vision of greater success for all, with no child left behind, while others do not. Reeves' (2004) theory of connecting leaders and classrooms is considered to be a way that school leaders along with teachers can improve student achievement (Mazzoni & Gambrell, 2003; Pearson & Raphael, 2003). The concepts of (1) leadership supervision, (2) comprehensive curriculum, (3) strong professional development, and (4) leaders knowledgeable regarding curriculum, instruction, and assessment, are significant components of Reeves' theory of connections. Let us examine each of these components in more detail.

Systematic Supervision

First, Reeves (2004) believes that supervisors of a school system are most accountable for the success of the students. The foundation for his work is found in Marzano's (2003) theory regarding effective supervisors. In an effort to determine what makes supervisors successful, Marzano (2003) found that effective principals took the pulse of the building, identified a strategic intervention, and continually examined the effect of that intervention on achievement. The supervisor used small group leadership and inspired the staff with strong guidance, optimism, honesty and consideration.
Influenced by Marzano, Reeves (2004) wrote that leaders must coach and supervise their colleagues systematically, through discussions and action items related to student achievement and best practices. Interaction needed to occur between leaders and teachers before teachers were committed to the implementation of new curriculum and instruction. Reeves extends the findings of Berman and McLaughlin (1977), who in their study of teacher efficacy with 342 teachers found that, without the support of the school administrator, efforts at innovation failed. Reeves' work also parallels with the work of Collopy and Bowman (2003), who studied the writing instruction and current and future teachers at Winthrop University and Fort Mill (SC) Elementary School, and found that it is the principal who rallies the teachers' enthusiasm and keeps them focused on innovations, while distributing resources and staying alert to teacher concerns.

Reeves' (2004) theory is supported by Saha and Biddle (2006), who surveyed 120 principals in the United States and Australia and found that most experienced pressure from their peers to be innovative, and as a result supported innovation and provided the supervision necessary for its success. In addition, Saha and Biddle found that that the success of the innovation was correlated more to the enthusiasm of the supervising principal than to the strategy used to encourage the innovation, and that the collegial approach was more effective than the authoritarian approach. They also discovered that the principals' ability to acquire and apply research knowledge was the underlying reason for the staffs' positive attitudes toward innovation.

Similar to Reeves' (2004) findings, Lewis and Batts (2005), in a study of differentiation with 32 teachers at North Topsail Elementary, in Hampstead, NC,
discovered successful supervisors provided professional development, instructional videos, assigned readings, and observations of the students' successes and growth. In addition, Ferrero (2005) in his study of belief systems and practice in seven great small high schools supported by the Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation, concurred with Reeves' (2004) thinking. He wrote there are many ways for a school to be good, but they definitely needed one shared philosophy regarding the necessity of high standards for all staff, a philosophy that was also championed by the supervisor. This was confirmed by Corbett, Wilson and Williams (2005) in their study of one school in two districts where the teachers said they were responsible for student success. They discovered that these great urban teachers shared common beliefs, namely, they did not accept failure for their students and it was critical to those teachers that they receive time and support from their supervisor.

Overall, these research findings affirm the important role that systemic supervision can play in supporting teachers in their quest for improved outcomes.

Comprehensive Curriculum

In addition to systematic supervision, Reeves (2004) believes that a school system must be willing to assess and report on the relationship of the curriculum efforts to authentic implementation in the classroom. Such curriculum must be written with the goal of producing a literate citizenry (Ornstein, Behar-Horenstein, & Pajak, 2003). Subsequently, to be effective, curriculum needs to be aligned with instruction as well as with the state assessments that are utilized to monitor students' growth and school effectiveness. Such a curriculum contains standards and benchmarks that are appropriate for each grade level and agreed upon by leaders in the respective fields.
The foundation for Reeves' (2004) thinking on the importance of a comprehensive curriculum was established in Marzano’s theory of effective schools. When examining effective schools over the last 35 years, Marzano (2003) cited the critical school-level factors as being a guaranteed curriculum, challenging goals and feedback, parent and community involvement, safe and orderly environment, and collegiality and professionalism (Good & Brophy, 1986; Marzano, 2000; Reynolds & Teddlie, 2000; Scheerens & Bosker, 1997). He used the results of five previous research efforts to place these factors in the order of impact on student achievement, discovering that a guaranteed curriculum was first on the list.

Influenced by Marzano, Reeves (2004) went on to claim that a comprehensive, aligned curriculum produced successful schools only if the school system was willing to determine and document the relationship of the curriculum alignment to actual implementation in the classroom. This measurement via the school improvement plan must assess a few things consistently rather than many things once a year.

According to Reeves (2004), as well as Guskey (2003), the focus on the comprehensive curriculum, which resulted in changes in instruction and increased student success, caused changes in teachers’ beliefs. They both noted that this change process comes in stages, requiring extra effort from the teachers and involving stress. In addition, the teachers need regular feedback regarding the progress of their students’ learning to keep motivated. If supported in their use of the curriculum, the teachers then find the time to translate research based strategies into sound instruction.
and subsequently modify it for their diverse student populations (NICHD, 2000; Snow et al., 1998).

While also investigating the impact of curriculum, over the course of two years Knapp (1991) found that schools made up of a majority of at-risk students which had higher than expected achievement spent more time on reading and writing curriculum and instruction. Teachers allocated twice as much time as others in less successful schools. However, in a related study Allington and Cunningham (1996) discovered that typically teachers were so isolated they had no idea how much time other teachers devoted to reading and writing curriculum and instruction.

On the whole, these research findings confirm the important role that comprehensive curriculum can play in sustaining teachers in their quest for improved outcomes.

Professional Development

In addition to systematic supervision and a comprehension curriculum, Reeves (2004) stresses that teaching is a science as well as an art in that certain teaching practices have a high degree of success. The No Child Left Behind mandate made professional development even more important than previously, requiring educators to be fully certified and highly qualified for their positions. To examine the impact of professional development, Marzano (2003) researched teachers using a 66-item survey instrument about their use of instructional strategies, a classroom management plan, and support of curriculum design. He found that expert teachers had more strategies at their disposal than ineffective teachers. These teachers had a list of rules, procedures and interventions with consequences. They knew curriculum standards
and benchmarks and made sure that their students had engaging exposures to them; in addition, they used aligned assessments to determine mastery.

Reeves (2006) extended the research of earlier studies when he wrote that, due to all the challenges in education today, teachers require a step-by-step process that narrows the research-to-practice gap while meeting students’ needs. According to Blasé and Blasé (1998), teachers needed to be involved in the planning of professional development in order for them to be concerned about the content and implementation of the professional development. In their inventory of 809 teachers from the southeastern, midwestern and northwestern United States, they found that professional development needed to take place in the daytime, perhaps grouping teachers when students attended art, music and physical education classes, starting school at different times, releasing students or gaining funds for buying substitutes (Fullan, 2003; Murphy, 1997). In addition, according to Kelleher (2003), professional development was most successful when embedded in the teachers’ work. Where an effective implementation of aligned instruction and curriculum occurred, principals had provided staff development that allowed teachers to study together regularly, build a strong commitment to meeting the needs of each student and encourage one another as the changes in instruction occur (Strickland, Ganske, & Monroe, 2002). Teachers who worked alone rarely modified instructional practices and, as a consequence, widened the research-to-practice gap (Greenwood & Maheady, 2001).

Reeves’ (2004) work also supports the findings of Fullan (2003), who found that change rarely occurred as a reaction to a mandate. Instead change occurred because educators had experienced a shift in their educational philosophy. Teachers
talk and problem-solve, thereby enhancing the school's capacity to improve student achievement (Fullan, 1998). Teachers then commit to change and they try to make a difference in the lives of their students by adjusting their classroom instructional strategies. King and Newmann (2000), in their study of two schools and professional development as well as school capacity, also discovered that learning capacity, as relates to both educators and students, was at the very base of school improvement and accountability. Taylor and Pearson (2002) in their study of two teachers per grade in eight high-poverty elementary schools, representing demographic and geography diversity, found that good teaching resulting from professional development really mattered.

Reeves' (2004) theory was also impacted by additional research conducted about what constitutes meaningful professional development for practicing teachers that will stretch their learning capacities (Anders, Hoffman, & Duffy, 2000). Guskey (2003) and Hawley and Valli (1999) reviewed those characteristics, as did Desimone, Porter, Garet, Yoon, and Birman (2002). They found these principles of good professional development: (1) it connected to student learning, (2) the goals were clear and accepted, (3) it involved active learning for teachers, (4) it was embedded in the context of work in schools, (5) it was continuous and ongoing, and (6) it was related to an inquiry as to what strategies are currently used and which could be better. Furthermore, in 2003, Everett, Tichenor, and Heins, in their study of 42 teachers involved in professional development at one site, discovered that teachers felt a greater sense of professional knowledge and collegiality due to a professional development experience. Borko, Davinroy, Bliem, and Cumbo (2000), in their study...
of two veteran teachers of intensive math, discovered that teachers who designed and
used assessments that were aligned with instructional goals, grew in conceptual
knowledge, had higher expectations for their students and allowed for active student
participation.

In support of Reeves (2004) who studied the importance of professional
development in schools, Fisher, Lapp and Flood (2005) in their study of literacy
accountability demands found there were needs for professional development that
involved consensus scoring and planning. Their information about the usefulness of
peer review came from research conducted in multiple places around the world. They
noted that in Japan a small group of teachers planned instruction, delivered that
instruction and then met again to discuss the outcomes of the lesson, even as in the
United States an evaluation model was used that considered the perspectives of
multiple people when looking at performance.

In agreement with Reeves’ (2004) premise, and attempting on a large scale to
broaden teachers’ learning capacities, the Literacy Specialist Project was launched in
August 2000 by the Ohio Department of Education. The goal was the spreading of
foundational knowledge about literacy instruction to K-3 teachers and building
capacity within school districts for high quality professional development (Kinnucan-
Welsch, Rosemary, & Grogan, 2006). Participants in the study included 14 faculties
from 10 universities, 353 literacy specialists and 2,490 teachers in 122 districts. They
found that competent, accomplished teachers played a critical role in student success,
and that professional development can play a vital part in the teachers’ success.
Overall, these research findings verify the important position that professional development can play in supporting teachers in their quest for improved student outcomes.

Leaders' Knowledge of Curriculum, Instruction, Assessment

As a fourth key component in addition to supervision, curriculum, and professional development, Reeves (2006) acknowledged that certain teaching practices have shown more success than others, and he expects the supervisor to set the direction of the professional development agenda. For example, at Oceanview Elementary in Virginia, the principal and team leaders provided professional development, and in five years reading scores increased 37 percentage points. Similarly, Albert-Laszlo Barabasi’s (2003) research indicated that effective leaders found the key members of their schools and cultivated their commitment to change models. Such persons shared information, squelched negative rumors, taught key skills and modeled values consistent with the desired improvements.

More support for Reeves' (2004) work came from Kelehear and Davison (2005) who studied 882 students and 61 certified teachers working in teacher teams in a K-5 school in Georgia. This school was successful when the supervisor believed that teachers needed to be included in decision-making with curriculum, scheduling, budgeting and personnel to build a sense of responsibility. In addition, these teacher leaders were found to be most effective as “gentle nudgers” of their colleagues, not “bulldozers” (Ackerman & Mackenzie, 2006).

Furthermore, Reeves (2006) studied Simpson-Waverly Elementary School, where 94 percent of the students qualified for free or reduced-price lunch. Many did
not live with their parents, low morale among students and low achievement were common. Principal James Thompson changed his leadership approach to a network-supporting role. His role at staff meetings became one of a listener, where he questioned teachers whose students did well about the strategies they use, stressing that the focus of the conversation was on learning, not evaluation. He set up a peer-to-peer teacher network and structure for mutual observation. Simpson-Waverly students outperformed some of their more affluent suburban neighbors on achievement measures. The school now is a statewide model for academic excellence. Principal Thompson advised finding and listening to the islands of excellence within the school. Leaders seeking change must give up their dream that human organizations function as hierarchies and see the importance of networking.

In conclusion, similar to Reeves (2004), others have found that there is often a knowing-doing gap (Pfeffer & Sutton, 2000), whereby school leadership knows what to do, but the effect of hierarchical communication hinders effective actions. Within this hierarchy, attention must be paid to the fact that teachers, principals and superintendents emphasize instructional matters differently, while principals and superintendents focus more on managerial and political matters (Shen, 1998).

Overall, these research findings verify the important role that the leaders' knowledge of curriculum, instruction, and assessment can play in supporting teachers in their search for improved outcomes.

Classroom Instruction Related to Writing

Having completed the review of empirical research regarding leadership-influenced practices that impact instruction, we can now turn our attention to literacy
instruction. This includes reading and writing, the specific area most in need of attention in many school systems across our nation. In categorizing the research examining literacy and trying to determine the best comprehensive literacy curriculum and instruction, the federal government collected data from first-and second-grade classrooms around the United States in the 1960s (Allington & Cunningham, 1996). They found four main approaches. These include phonics, basals, trade books, and writing. Let us familiarize ourselves with these four approaches in more detail.

Components of a Literacy Framework

First, the alphabetic or phonic approach of sounding out letters is the original method used for literacy curriculum and instruction in our country (Allington & Cunningham, 1996). Research conducted by Adams (1990) and supported by Reeves (2004), came to the conclusion that most children can decode the letter-sound system, but teaching this system directly speeds up the literacy process. Furthermore, at-risk students who have had limited experiences with reading and writing need this explicit decoding and subsequent encoding writing instruction.

Second, a basal reader approach to reading is utilized. This includes an emphasis on sight words and comprehension, rather than phonics (Allington & Cunningham, 1996). This approach gives teachers reading material that they can use to guide the teaching of pattern words, vocabulary and comprehension. A variety of genres, authors, topics and cultures is presented to the students. In addition, such basal readers are organized around certain grade-level goals and standards for the year.
Third, the 1960s brought the trade book curriculum, utilizing an individualized program developed by Veatch (1959). The strength of this program is that the children select their own books based on their interests, the teacher conferences with them about their self-selected texts. Students respond to the text in writing. This approach to reading was also a part of the whole language movement of the 1980s.

Finally, in addition to being influenced by the phonic, basal and trade book theories, literacy instruction was being influenced by the writing workshop approach, developed in the late 1980s. The writing workshop approach uses the underlying premise that the easiest material for a child to read is his or her own writing. Analogous to reading trade books, this is considered to be a meaningful activity, and children who engage in more writing activities become fluent in writing as well as in reading (Tierney & Shanahan, 1991).

These four literacy strategies have been thoroughly examined and cited by experts in the field of literacy, including Reeves (2004), to be among the most widely accepted strategies. However, research and observation indicate that no single approach is successful for all learners (Pearson & Raphael, 2003). Since every reading approach, individually, is seen to have some positive as well as some negative outcomes, combination approaches work better than any single approach (Bond & Dykstra, 1967). Another benefit for the use of a multi-method approach to literacy curriculum and instruction is the attention paid to the wide array of learning styles of students. Some children are better at learning letters and sounds, others at writing, some enjoy choosing their own books and others relish talking about the
stories. The foundation for a comprehensive literacy curriculum, therefore, involves all four different literacy approaches used throughout the history of our nation (Mazzoni & Gambrell, 2003).

*The Four Blocks Comprehensive Literacy Framework*

Desiring to build a comprehensive literacy program framed and influenced by each of the four main historical approaches, Cunningham and Hall (1998) built a framework referred to as *Four Blocks* (Cunningham, Hall, & Sigmon, 1999). Thirty to forty minutes each day is to be given to the following: (1) the writing block, which includes process and focused writing; (2) a words block, which addresses sight words, phonics and spelling; (3) a self-selected reading block, which includes genre instruction for writing and reading, read alouds, and independent reading; and (4) a guided reading block, in which comprehension strategies are taught, discussed and shared in writing and conversation. The first principle of their framework is the importance of making a schedule, including each of the four components, and sticking to it.

Specifically describing the writing block, Cunningham and Hall (1998) recommend the use of a writer’s workshop model (Calkins, 1994; Graves, 1995). This includes writing instruction in which students choose their own topics, write, revise, edit and share, all while being viewed and treated as real authors. There is a mini-lesson in which the teacher writes and models, time for students to write while the teacher conferences individually, and time for sharing in small or whole group. The foundation for this work is found in Graves’ (1995) theory of the importance of modeling; Routman’s (1994) theory, which asked teachers to demonstrate as writers.
who wrote with a reader in mind, used self-selected topics and conferences to assess; and Calkins’ (1994) theory which stressed the importance of sharing and children taught to viewing themselves as authors. These principles were thought to be the strongest links to writing success, and these concepts of modeling, conferencing, and sharing were the three strategies featured in the Cunningham and Hall (1998) framework of writing instruction.

Reeves (2004) agreed with Adams (1990), who found that children, especially those at risk, needed a rich variety of reading and writing experiences, as well as direct instruction in letter-sound patterns. This variety is included as the second principle of the Cunningham and Hall (1998) framework: a focus in each block on multi-level instruction made possible through mixed-ability grouping (Hall & Cunningham, 2003).

Our earlier review of the connections between leaders and teachers demonstrated that there is a high level of significance placed on the interaction between the leader and the teacher and the impact that interaction can have on the teacher’s individual decision to use or ignore effective literacy strategies. Therefore, it is noteworthy that Hall and Cunningham (2003) created for leaders a concise checklist of the instructional practices, enabling administrators to understand exactly which strategies need to be implemented and when they need to be implemented for effective literacy instruction to occur. Figure 1 offers an overview of the Four Blocks Literacy Framework.
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>30 – 40 minutes of Self-Selected Reading</th>
<th>30 – 40 minutes of Guided Reading</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>• Read aloud, genre study</td>
<td>• Discuss thinking strategy/purpose</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Read and conference</td>
<td>• Read</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Share</td>
<td>• Share purpose through discussion and writing</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>30 – 40 minutes of Working with Words</th>
<th>30 – 40 minutes of Writing</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>• Practice Word Wall</td>
<td>• Model</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Write - On the Back Word Study</td>
<td>• Write and conference</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Word Activity</td>
<td>• Share writing</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Figure 1. *Four Blocks* Model of Balanced Literacy. Framework Developed by Cunningham & Hall.

**Critiques of the Four Blocks Model of Literacy Writing**

Regardless of the support received by experts in the literacy field on effective literacy instruction, the comprehensive *Four Blocks* framework has been critiqued for the ways the strategies are applied and the framework's usefulness for educators and students. Simultaneously, however, these critiques also provide evidence for the fact that an assortment of sound instructional strategies are included within *Four Blocks*, several of which had been used in classroom practice for many years.

Focusing not on the recommended strategies, but on the ways in which the strategies were used, Hibbert and Iannacci (2005) offered a critique of the commercial products available for a balanced literacy program, one being the *Four Blocks* framework. They challenged the literacy framework in relation to time...
limitations and discernment. They pointed out that the block approach is too
constrained by time and that teachers said they had trouble finding the time to do each
block each day and staying within the time limits. Nevertheless, in an attempt to
provide a balanced critique, Hibbert and Iannacci (2005) noted that the Cunningham
and Hall (1998) framework had encouraged the current movement toward more
mixed-ability grouping, which they deemed very valuable.

Rettig and Canady (1999) found that teachers and students said it was difficult
being productive when time allotments were rigid. In addition, time constraints were
not compatible with Spiegel’s (1998) claim that balanced literacy was about teachers
making instructional decisions depending on the students’ mastery of certain skills.
These types of decisions that Dudley-Marling and Murphy (2001) and Dewey (1939,
1968) sought from educators were considered to be under-developed if an educator
used a literacy instructional model. They feared that the effect of touting one
particular balanced literacy program as essential for a school’s success discouraged
an educator’s creativity.

Finally, the *Four Blocks* model defines comprehensive and balanced literacy
as consisting of the daily implementation of the four main approaches to literacy
instruction (Cunningham, Hall, & Defee, 1991). To other researchers, though, all
aspects of reading and writing should receive appropriate, rather than equal time
(Ruiz, Vargas, & Beltran, 2002; Strickland, 1998).

*Empirical Research on the Implementation of a Literacy Model*

Examinations of the usefulness of a comprehensive literacy framework have
been done in various educational settings. A review of this empirical research is
presented with specific attention paid to the methodology, institutional setting, and operational definitions used to evaluate the implementation of and accountability for a comprehensive framework.

There are several ways of categorizing the research examining the implementation of a comprehensive literacy framework. Some research was initiated by implementing a quantitative methodology with studies done in both public and private schools. In addition, the research is further divided in terms of the definition of a comprehensive literacy program, the support given by the administration and the impact on educators and students. This review of empirical studies dealing with a comprehensive literacy curriculum and instruction is initially divided by the definition of the implementation of the program and further categorized by the impact on the institutions in which the study was conducted.

**Definition of the implementation of a comprehensive literacy curriculum.** Data in the mid-1990s revealed that failure to learn to read at grade level by third grade or age nine was correlated with nearly every undesirable social, political, and economic problem (Fielding, Kerr, & Rosier, 2004). In addition, in 1994 the National Assessment of Educational Progress results indicated that fourth-grade literacy scores were declining. Therefore, by the late 1990s, public and political opinions stated that literacy instruction was in dire need of reform. Public outcries for accountability in the United States have challenged public schools since the *No Child Left Behind Act (NCLB)* became law on January 8, 2002, with the goal of closing the achievement difference between high and low-performing students. This law clearly states that educators are responsible for the measured growth of all their students in reading,
mathematics, and language, including those students at risk of not meeting state test standards.

The NCLB system for school improvement (Fullan, 2003; King & Newmann, 2000) asks educators to produce an implementation plan for more effective teaching and learning strategies that changes the ways schools conduct business (NICHD, 2000; Snow, Burns, & Griffin, 1998). Schools are allowed to determine their school’s unique culture and make their own school improvement plan and program decisions for improving literacy (U.S. Department of Education, 2002). Moreover, NCLB mandates do not determine the reading or writing curricula, methods of instruction or material to be used for classroom instruction. It states only that literacy instruction must encompass research-based programs and practices. Their literature and documentation do not specify proven strategies nor do they indicate how the step-by-step process of implementation of such researched based practices could or should take place.

As a result, a large number of studies have examined the implementation of various researched literacy methods. Educators are challenged to interpret research-based literacy strategies, decide how to incorporate them into their classroom practices and how to adapt these practices for their own unique student populations. Showers and Joyce (1996) found that classroom instruction improved with the following sequential improvement process: (1) a research-based strategy was presented to the staff, (2) the skills required for implementing that strategy were demonstrated, (3) the skills required to adjust the process were practiced, (4) conversations occurred with colleagues to develop a plan to incorporate the skills
within a classroom, (5) peers supported one another in the implementation process, and (6) data were collected and used to fine-tune the researched practices to meet individual needs. Therefore, researchers discussed how schools, not just classrooms, could create an environment that allowed teachers to study together regularly, to build a strong dedication to meeting the needs of each student through successful instruction practices, and to encourage one another as the changes occurred (Strickland, 2002).

Literacy programs are sometimes implemented on a system-wide basis. Researching such a system-wide literacy effort, Bartholomew (2006) examined the mayor's prescription for a balanced literacy program implementation process in 1,400 of New York City's public schools, involving 1.1 million children and 134,000 employees, starting in 2002 (City of New York, 2004). In this case, Mayor Michael Bloomberg used standardized mandates that dictated almost everything the classroom teacher could do. This new centralized organizational structure produced strained relations with teachers requested to implement the standards. There was a loss of job ownership by teachers and principals. This in turn supported research that found teachers and principals thrive in environments that value staff member contributions in problem solving (Litt & Turk, 1985; Serviovanni, 1967). According to Bartholomew, more research is needed on maintaining job ownership even while reshaping and implementing new policies and effective practices.

In addition, the academic world seeks to improve upon existing research regarding the implementation of a literacy curriculum and instructional framework. A study attempting to define an exemplary implementation model for school reform that
school leaders could use was conducted by Southworth and Doughty (2006). They examined whether school leaders made a difference by studying the distributed leadership model (Elmore, 2000; Leithwood & Riehl, 2003; Spillane, Halverson, & Diamond, 1999). After six years of rigorous research at England's National College for School Leadership, the following lessons were learned: (1) the context in which educators work, whether rural or urban, local or regional, is an important factor in school improvement; (2) good leaders must also be good managers; and (3) principals as leaders and as practitioners must understand their own vision and have an understanding of best practices for literacy instruction and be able to focus on teaching and learning.

Very small and focused implementations occur as well. Hall, Prevatte, and Cunningham (1995) described a three-year project in two schools in which teachers explored changing the organization of literacy to the Four Blocks model. They allowed for more multilevel instruction, eliminating the need for ability grouping and eliminating seat work. These types of changes, combined with professional development, were found to be important pieces of their successful interventions plans.

Implementing a comprehensive literacy program for at-risk students. The NCLB government mandates also hold educators accountable for comprehensive literacy programs for those students at risk of failing in school. Specifically, these students included those coming from backgrounds identified as economically disadvantaged, from various racial and ethnic groups, and those with disabilities and limited English skills. Research has been documented supporting effective literacy
strategies for at-risk students who require additional resource supports in the form of tools and structure (Blythe, Allen, & Powell, 1999; Fullan, 2003; King & Newmann, 2000; National Institute of Child Health and Human Development, 2000; Showers & Joyce, 1996; Snow, Burns, & Griffin, 1998).

Cognitive, emotional, social and instructional factors must be examined when determining how to support at risk students who are learning or acquiring literacy strategies (Lipson & Wixson, 1997). At its foundation is how quickly children gain strategies for decoding words. Juel (1988) reported that 88% of the children who scored in the lowest quartile in reading at the end of first grade remained below the 50th percentile at the end of fourth grade. This included students identified as at risk as well as others not defined as at-risk students. Many of these at-risk children have few opportunities to participate in significant literacy-related experiences and are less likely to build up automatic skills (Adams, 1990). Researchers Kameenui and Carnine discovered that studies agree that there is a small amount of time spent on writing instruction in our K-12 schools (1998). Instead, in the name of creativity, arts and crafts dominate literacy instruction, the state writing criteria never gets taught and writing is assigned with a vague set of instructions (Schmoker, 2006).

Many at-risk children find reading and writing to be difficult and frustrating. Due to the fact that so much cognitive energy has to be focused on decoding and encoding, the students are less likely to engage in reading and writing on their own. If they do not write or read, they are less likely to develop fluency, vocabulary, and an understanding about the world. These students have no motivation to write and read. This downward spiraling of literacy achievement has been noted to be a key
determinant of school failure (Stanovich, 1986). This lack of success in literacy achievement in school has a strong impact on a child's earning potential. The income level of those who have not graduated from high school is $10,838, which is barely above the official poverty line in the United States (Marzano, 2004). What about those students who do make it into college? The sad state of literacy education is one indicator as to why an estimated one half of those who enter college do not return for their sophomore year (Olson, 2005).

Marzano (2003) examined the resource supports for the literacy programs of schools that included at-risk students. His research revealed that parents with at-risk children needed to be informed as well as educated in how to help their struggling students. The students' background knowledge and vocabulary needed to be enhanced through experiences such as field trips and the students' self-esteem needed reinforcement. Marzano (2004) stated that the research on school success provides clear guidance in relation to effective schooling, but posited that we need to reflect and conduct studies on how to turn school improvement research into structured action.

In an attempt to turn literacy research into action, at-risk students were placed in small tutoring groups and studied by Hiebert, Colt, Catto, and Gury (1992). This small group-tutoring program for at-risk students included systemic word study and practice with easy books, and it showed improvement for those students studied. In a similar vein, Taylor, Frye, Short, and Shearer (1992) planned and implemented a small-group in-classroom tutoring program for struggling first-graders. This included repeated reading of trade books and fluency. These researchers used a quantitative
methodology with assessments given and comparisons made to average peers. Results indicated that variance occurred based on the skills of the tutor. In addition, comparable small group tutored-programs identified as Reading Recovery (Clay, 1985) and Success for All (Slavin, Madden, Karweit, Livermon, & Dolan, 1992), characterized by one-on-one reading and writing tutoring for struggling first-graders, resulted in evidence supportive of success.

If school staff offers tutoring for at-risk students, more positive and effective changes in literacy instruction occur at the classroom and school level according to Broaddus and Bloodgood (1994). They used interviews, a survey, observations and reflective notes to examine students’ perceptions of literacy over three years in a rural K-6 building school in a mid-Atlantic state housing 350 students. Twenty-nine percent of the schools were comprised of minority groups, and 32% received free and reduced price lunch.

The positive impact of school staff on at-risk students was also studied by Doorman and Alber (2005) who conducted an examination of an implementation program that involved teacher study teams in many of Mississippi’s lowest performing schools. The schools’ plans for improvement allowed teachers time to study together over a three-year period. They found that educator dialogue and problem-solving were indeed effective for building a school’s capacity to improve student achievement (Fullan, 1998, 2003). This included having an action plan that included conversations to understand what works according to literacy research as well as a study of effective assessment pieces (Blythe, Allen, & Powell, 1999; Showers & Joyce, 1996). The faculties found that the conversations related to student
work and assessments reduced their workload, promoted a better understanding of effective literacy strategies and encouraged instructional modifications. This confirmed earlier research that also found that effective instruction increased when administrators and teachers studied student data and mapped the use of evidence-based practice (Baker & Smith, 2001; Fuchs & Fuchs, 2001; Greenwood & Maheady, 2001). Many of the studied schools also asked for research on how to use a structured procedure to make their reflective process more effective and utilize common planning time effectively.

In another K-5 elementary school setting with a team consisting of a general education teacher and a special educator, at-risk students benefited within the class of 24 fourth-graders and two teachers (Schnorr & Davern, 2005). Their research revealed that paired teachers are effective if they have a shared knowledge of successful literacy practices.

Overall, tutoring intervention programs for at-risk students did not support or connect with the implementation of comprehensive literacy programs within the classroom setting (Shanahan & Barr, 1995). The lack of connection between the methods and materials and between the classroom and the tutoring program hinders the delicate learning of the students who are most in need of consistent instruction (Allington & Cunningham, 1996). Likewise, Shanahan and Barr (1995) stated that an at-risk intervention program is a different model from one that has overall goals for school change (Slavin, Madden, Karweit, Dolan, & Wasik, 1992). These researchers, as well as Gaskins (1998) from the Benchmark School program, agreed that school
systems needed congruence between classroom instruction and remediation, with professional development that had the teachers taking ownership of the program.

In summary, tutoring programs are one component of a comprehensive literacy program. It is no wonder Graff’s (2003) estimates only 20 percent of students arrive at college with the ability to write even ostensibly well. Furthermore, a third or more of college students need remedial English (Schmoker, 2006).

Literature Review Conclusion

There are several reasons why public schools have become increasingly interested in improving their success rates (Fielding, et al., 2004; Wagner, et al., 2006). The failure to pass state tests measuring academic achievement impacts the school in terms of public perception, and in turn impacts school district enrollments and budgets. In addition, the competition between countries in a global knowledge economy has continued to increase. The result causes unparalleled expectations on public school education leaders demanding a systemic change in the public school and the use of more effective tools (Wagner, et al., 2006).

Michael Fullan (2003) asserts that leadership is to this decade what standards were to the 1990s. Researchers call for more studies on how to help leaders build high-performing school systems, specifically in the age of accountability. They also ask for leader-influenced practices that impact classroom instruction with school systems moving away from outdated 20th-century models of leadership.
CHAPTER III: METHODOLOGY

Introduction

The goal of this study is to examine to what extent and how leadership-influenced practices effectively impact classroom instruction within the context of a writing program. Therefore, this study is about how one school's leaders were able to influence their classrooms in such a manner as to successfully impact student success in writing. The school is the unit of analysis, and the educators provided data on how their classroom-level activities are influenced and effectively impacted by four leadership influenced practices: (1) systematic supervision, (2) comprehensive curriculum, (3) supported professional development, and (4) the leaders' knowledge of curriculum, instruction and assessment.

The study focuses on 14 individual teachers employed at the same institution, with various degrees of experience, and working with an at-risk population of students. In addition, the study examines the two leaders at the school, specifically the principal and the reading specialist. The goal is to examine what role, if any, the leaders and their leadership practices had played upon the experiences of the classroom teachers. This research is important because it deals with the teaching practices of an at-risk population of students and the factors that contributed to the success in writing of these students and their educators, despite the challenges they faced.

Definition of Terms

For the purposes of this study, several terms must be given operational definitions in order to understand the goals and methods of this research. Specifically
the following five terms must be defined: (1) at risk, (2) systematic supervision, (3) comprehensive curriculum especially as pertains to writing, (4) professional development, and (5) leaders' knowledge about curriculum, instruction, and assessment.

The literature provides several criteria by which a student may be considered at risk. Some of these include students with high absenteeism, students with special needs or first generation students. For the purpose of this study, however, students were considered at risk if they are from a low socio-economic class.

Reeves (2004) posited that leadership supervision must be a strong component of a student-centered accountability system. Such supervision involves leaders examining their buildings' practices and supervising the connection of those practices to student achievement. This might involve supervision practices such as having the leader visit each classroom daily to observe what is being taught and how it is being taught. It includes recognizing teacher best practices at staff meetings.

Many studies dealing with education define curriculum as any program of study. Since this study examines the students who are able to be successful writers, curriculum was defined as a balanced, comprehensive literacy program aligned with the state grade level expectations. Within a student-centered accountability system, the leaders must be committed to implementing a comprehensive curriculum, particularly in the core basic subjects such as reading, writing and math. As part of their supervision practices, the leaders examine if standards, such as the Michigan Grade Level Content Expectations, are actually being taught or courses of study planned to reflect the standards. For example, one well-known comprehensive
structure for literacy and writing instruction at the elementary level involves a balanced literacy framework entitled *Four Blocks* (Cunningham & Hall, 1998). Within a student-centered accountability model, leaders would ascertain whether or not the students are able to master grade level curriculum expectations as evidenced through the use of rubrics within this curriculum, and if not, provide support to the teachers as needed to accomplish this goal.

In addition, Reeves’ theory implies greater success via student-centered accountability when educators are congruent philosophically with the use of best practices because they are well versed in them. This philosophical alignment occurs when leaders make teachers’ successes the focal point of *strong professional development*, and the teachers are involved in the development of professional development planning and activities. This might be evidenced through the use of the school literacy coach directly supporting the teachers as they seek to utilize the best practices discussed and agreed upon in the professional development.

Finally, Reeves notes that leaders must be *knowledgeable regarding curriculum, instruction, and assessment*. For example, the discussions of principals and reading specialists at faculty meetings must focus on student achievement as well as instructional practices, and parent contacts are initiated to focus on academic achievement.

**Research Method**

As is suitable to the nature of this study and the subject matter to be reviewed, a qualitative research approach was implemented. There are several factors that must be included in the selection of a methodology, such as the setting for the research, the
goals of the study, and the nature of the subject matter. Each of these factors is therefore examined specifically.

This study examined educators employed at one school site, including their experiences with comprehensive curriculum, systematic supervision, professional development, and leaders knowledgeable about curriculum, instruction and assessment. Data were collected from within the teachers' working environment, a natural setting where events occur (Creswell, 1998). This qualitative methodology was appropriate for an examination of the connections between teachers and leaders at a specific institution which implemented a comprehensive literacy program that included supervision, professional development activities associated with a literacy agenda, and leaders knowledgeable about literacy.

The choice of a qualitative study was based on the ability of the researcher to generate a description of a certain event or an understanding of a definite setting or environment (Bodgan & Biklen, 2003). This research sought to understand the factors that went into developing a particular group of teachers that was impacted by their leaders. It attempts to gain an understanding of the story behind each teacher. As such, qualitative methods are appropriate for research that attempts to recognize and make meaning of specific experiences (Patton, 1990). Therefore, this methodology was utilized with the participants of this study.

The implementation of a qualitative approach is also fitting for this study since schools, because of various professional developments in different programs, utilize numerous writing strategies. Qualitative research can therefore be used as a rationale or justification for a specific reform or change (Creswell, 2003). As a result,
the findings of this study may be of interest to both the participants and other schools. This research sought to understand the factors that went into teachers’ connecting to their leader and what role, if any, such leaders may have played in making those connections. Information obtained using a qualitative approach in this setting may be useful to schools in discussions about effective writing and leadership practices for both teachers and leaders.

The type of subject matter selected for examination also determined the selection of a qualitative approach. This research sought to study the mechanisms that 14 educators identified as being significant to their ability to teach successfully. It would be complicated to identify all the possible variables that might be identified by these teachers as impacting the sense of accountability for their students’ successes, due to the vast number of possibilities. Factors such as financial concerns, family pressures, a change in a marital situation, mental and physical wellbeing issues, and surfacing career aspirations are just some factors that could have been recognized by these teachers. Qualitative research is fitting when variables are difficult to define or identify (Creswell, 1998). Therefore, the use of this methodology was appropriate.

Case Study Approach

Qualitative methods can be utilized with any of five specific traditions: biography, phenomenology, grounded theory, ethnography, or case study (Creswell, 1998). The case study approach was chosen, due to the purpose and goals of the research to understand the impact of leadership practices on writing instruction within one school.
The case study tradition has been used in many similar settings, including education (Tesch, 1988). As a result, it is suitable for a study dealing with the experiences of educators. Additionally, this methodology allows for the study of a group of individuals as compared to a biography, which concerns one person (Creswell, 1998). The case study approach is fitting for the study of 14 teachers and two leaders in one building with at-risk students. It is a case study of how these participants functioned, producing the curricular and instructional system currently in place.

The case study approach was also appropriate because the subjects of this study have shared an experience that is unique to them. Within this case, all of the teachers of writing and the leaders are identified as being educators of at-risk students. The challenge was to discover what factors these educators identify as being influential in that process of developing successful writing students and how they understand that writing development occurred. The case study tradition tries to make meaning of the actions or interactions that happen to people in certain situations and to look at the process in which these individuals assign meaning to their experience (Bogdan & Biklen, 2003). The attempt was made to comprehend what transpired that enabled these educators to connect to their leaders’ beliefs. The researcher tried to determine what factors the educators themselves thought were influential in their ability to be committed to their school’s plan of improvement in literacy.

The case study approach was also suitable given the goals of this study. Case studies value in-depth interviews with study participants (Creswell, 1998). These interviews give the researcher the ability to gain more depth as to the details of the
leadership practices and classroom instruction. The opportunity to follow up with participants in the midst of the study allowed the researcher the opportunity to better determine what factors go into the capacity to connect to leadership. This permitted the participants' experience to be divided into textural and structural categories so the researcher could examine both the what and how of the experience. The study determined how the teachers connect to their leaders instead of merely investigating the factors that caused them to connect to the leadership.

The data analysis process within the case study tradition also upheld the goals of the study. There are potentially several factors that may play a part in an educator's decision to connect to the school's leadership and be held accountable for at-risk students. The case study approach is noteworthy in that it allowed for methodological reduction to take place in the data-analysis portion of the research (Creswell, 1998). The ability of the researcher to recognize themes or clusters of factors that went into the connections of the teachers and leaders during the data-analysis phase allowed for a further understanding of the experience of these educators with their at-risk students.

Primary Data Collection

Suitable data collection and analysis was ensured through the attention given to this particular school. All participants are part of the same school, required for this method of study to be considered suitable (Creswell, 1998). In addition, every effort was made to collect data from this group of teachers in order to help gain a fuller understanding of the case being considered (Creswell, 2003). Careful attention was
given to the process of choosing the setting for this research and the method of data collection and analysis.

The study took place at an accredited, elementary public school, K-5, with a population of approximately 400 students. This school’s MEAP writing scores increased dramatically for fourth grade, from 59.6 % passing in the winter of 2004 to 91.6 % passing in the fall of 2005. With 403 students and 24 teachers, there is a ratio of 17 students per teacher. The Asian population is 10%, Black population is 12%, Hispanic population is 14%, and the White population is 62%. Based on free and reduced lunch count numbers, 59% of the school’s students are considered to be at risk. It is a multi-ethnic, multi-cultural school where support services are extended to students in regular education, special education, and in English as a Second Language.

Selection of Participants

Collection of data began by identifying the pool of participants from the teachers who teach at the school. This process of participant selection continued by contacting the school administrator to obtain that office’s assistance in providing the list of teachers. Using contact information found in the school directory, the teachers identified as potential participants were invited to participate in the study. An email was delivered to each teacher with an explanation of the goals of the study and an invitation to take part in a personal interview lasting between 45 and 90 minutes. Interested teachers were invited to a time to review the goals of the study and the consent form.
A follow-up email was sent to all teachers who had shown a desire to participate in the study and signed the consent form. This email confirmed the date, time and location of the interview. Additionally, the email included the interview questions. These questions asked participants to examine and record their experiences with comprehensive literacy. Their responses were reviewed prior to the interview. The objective of this process was to provide participants with an additional opportunity for reflection outside of the interview process and provide the opportunity to enlarge upon these issues during the 45-90 minute time frame spent with the teacher.

Data Collection

Various kinds of data were collected for this case study. Interviews were scheduled at a time that was convenient for the teacher and took place in an office within the school building. Each session was audio taped to guarantee accuracy of records, permitting the researcher to focus on the teacher and his or her responses. The interview protocol and questions are included in Appendix A, and each interview lasted between 45 and 90 minutes. Prior to the interview, the educator signed a consent form permitting the session to be taped and transcribed verbatim for data analysis. A second interview was requested if clarification was needed. A third party was employed by the researcher to make certain of the accuracy, and to diminish potential bias, in the transcription process. All participants had an opportunity to review the written record at a later date to ensure accuracy and to permit any follow-up questions or comments. The principal and the reading specialist were also interviewed with the possibility of a second interview for clarification purposes. The
interview protocol is included in Appendix A. In addition, professional development plans and data on how they were carried out were gathered, and test scores were examined. Information as to how supervision was conducted was also collected and recorded. Finally, documentation and artifacts from the School Improvement Plan, teacher evaluation processes, and bulletin board displays were reviewed.

Ethical Considerations

Attention was given to all guidelines put forth by the HSRB at Western Michigan University (WMU). With that in mind, there were several steps taken to make certain that the privacy of study participants is protected (Locke, Spriduso, & Silverman, 2000). A protocol of informed consent was followed to make sure that participants are protected. This included getting permission from the HSRB prior to beginning any process of collecting data. Educators who are invited to take part were notified orally and in writing about the goals of the study as well as the data collection, analysis, and storage methods that are used in the study. Prior to conducting an interview, every participant was asked to sign a consent form signifying his or her desire to be included in the study (see Appendix B). Additionally, each participant was informed of his or her right to withdraw from the study at any time. Participants were also notified that they could review the written transcript from their interview and at that point make any helpful statements they felt were reasonable.

Consideration was taken to inform participants about the process of data collection, security, and storage. In this case, the recordings from the interviews and transcriptions are being stored in a locked filing cabinet in the office of the
researcher. These materials will be transferred to Western Michigan University at the conclusion of the study and stored there for a three-year period. During this period of time, the records will be available for inspection and copying by individuals who have been authorized by the institution sponsoring the research.

Data Verification and Analysis

An important factor in the data-analysis portion of this qualitative study is that the researcher was the primary source for data collection. As a result, the researcher made every attempt to limit the impact of any bias that may have existed. The direct involvement of the researcher in the data collection and analysis is one of the key challenges of qualitative research (Creswell, 2003), so steps are taken to limit the impact. This is accomplished through a process wherein the study participants are allowed to review and clarify transcripts from the interview and statements made during data collection.

In an attempt to limit any bias in this study, each educator was given the opportunity to review the record from his or her interview and make any statements or clarifications deemed appropriate. Additionally, attempts were made to confirm data by triangulating through multiple sources, rather than relying only on educator interviews. Particularly, this involved several sources: inviting teachers to include any records or artifacts that they felt spoke to their experience, reviewing academic records or scores with teachers, and/or exploring journals in conjunction with the study participants.

The purpose of analyzing data in qualitative research is to divide information into as many categories as is appropriate (Jacob, 1987). The objective of this process
is to identify themes from the frame of reference of the study participant and then to attempt to explain these patterns (Creswell, 2003) or understand the essence of their experience (Creswell, 1998). In order to accomplish these goals, the method of data analysis implemented in this research involved the use of coding.

Moustakas (1994) states that data should initially be divided into statements in a process known as horizontalization. This allows for categories of data to be developed where responses are clustered together to create themes within the data. From these clusters, the researcher sought to develop two distinct categories of data; one textural, dealing with the what, and the other structural, dealing with the how of the experience.

In this case, this involved distinguishing between the actual experiences of what happened to the educators and how they experienced their professional development. Since the case study approach to qualitative research was utilized in this study, the researcher sought to develop codes for the data through a process of reading and rereading the participant's transcripts. A post-hoc approach to the data analysis process was used in an attempt to gain an understanding of the occurrence. Through several readings of the data, the researcher reflected on and reviewed the responses of the individual participants in an attempt to create codes for similar experiences and to determine if they are textural or structural in nature, with the goal of dividing the codes into various categories. The overall purpose of the coding process utilized was to gain an understanding of the essence of the experience of the study participants (Creswell, 1998). From this process, the researcher gained a meaningful understanding of the factors that went into their ability to connect to their
leaders, regardless of the challenges faced. The data analysis was directly connected with the research questions, with data coding in relationship to each research question, identifying patterns found within.

Limitations

While the researcher made reasonable efforts to anticipate potential issues in the process of conducting this study, there were still limitations present in this project. The research was conducted using a qualitative methodology with a limited number of study participants. As a result, the responses of the 16 educators who participated cannot be applied to other educators or to a larger population of educators. The finding of this study can be used only to better understand and explain the experience of the individuals involved in the research.

Summary

The goal of this research was to understand the experiences of educators regarding their views on what impact, if any, comprehensive curriculum, supervision, and professional development had on connections between leader-influenced practices and classroom literacy instruction. The implementation of a qualitative approach was appropriate because it allowed for a story to be told and gave the ability to generate an understanding of the meaning of an experience (Patton, 2003). Specifically, the use of the case study approach within the qualitative tradition was used for this study because all of the participants had similar experiences developing students who were successful on the state writing assessment, including the students generally classified as at risk. The researcher acknowledged and responded to ethical considerations in the research process, as well as followed appropriate methods of
data collection and analysis to gain a deeper understanding of the experience of these educators and the factors influencing their students’ success in writing. Chapter 4 now follows with those findings.
CHAPTER IV: RESULTS

This qualitative study endeavored to learn more about leadership practices cited by Reeves (2004) and others as having the potential to effectively impact classroom instruction within the context of a writing program at a successful elementary school. This chapter contains the results, with findings categorized into themes and sub-themes with explanations and discussion presented for each grouping. A discussion of the connection of these themes to Reeves’ theory of student-centered accountability is presented in the “Review of Research Questions” in Chapter 5.

The purpose of this chapter is to provide the results of research findings and an analysis of the data resulting from personal interviews that took place with fourteen school teachers and two school leaders at an ethnically diverse school that had demonstrated significant improvements in their state writing scores. Questions asked during the interviews were open-ended to allow for in-depth responses. Some responses led to additional questions, which enabled the respondents to elaborate further on their answers, thereby adding to the richness of the descriptions contained in this analysis. A set protocol for all interviews was followed in an attempt to address the research questions while still allowing for dialogue and discussion to take place.

The researcher followed the process outlined by both Creswell (1998) and Patton (2002) for data analysis, which included identifying key words and phrases, organizing the information thematically, interpreting the meanings of phrases, and analyzing the meanings for what they revealed. The goal of this approach is to
uncover the meaning an individual attributes to his or her understanding in a systematic way using themes or clusters of data.

Leadership and School Activities

During the 1990s, prior to the implementation of the Four Blocks literacy curriculum, the staff at the school had been using a literacy program that was tightly scripted for teachers. In addition, the students had been grouped by their reading level, regardless of their age. The state assessment scores in reading and writing were among the lowest in the district. Therefore, upon the arrival of the new literacy specialist in 1998 and new principal in 1999, the decision was made by the staff to evaluate data and research regarding best literacy instructional practices. Subsequently, they voted to all use the framework of the Four Blocks and during the next six years the school’s MEAP fourth grade writing scores went from among the lowest in the district at 59.6% to among the highest at 91.6%.

As noted in Chapter 2, there has been much research and many recommendations regarding effective leadership-influenced practices that impact classroom instruction and, in turn, student outcomes. At the school level, Marzano (2003) cites the leader’s role as critical for establishing the goals, climate of the school, attitudes of teachers, classroom practices, organization of curriculum, and opportunities for students to learn, in addition to being essential for a school’s improvement and achievement. Building on this study, Reeves’ (2004) theory of student-centered accountability attempts to understand student achievement scores with information relating to at least four indicators, including a leader’s supervision,
the comprehensiveness of the curriculum being used, teaching practices supported by professional development, and the leader's knowledge of curriculum and instruction.

It is important to acknowledge these activities associated with effective leaders because such characteristics existed in the administrator and literacy specialist who participated in this study. Both supervised by constant and unwavering support of the school wide decision to improve student learning through the use of the *Four Blocks* framework, a large-scale, five-year initiative. Their leadership activities included evaluation of the teachers' instructional practices through frequent visits of the classrooms in which they observed the utilization of the various strategies listed in an administrator's *Four Blocks* checklist. Staff was asked routinely as to which materials were needed to implement the program, and the purchases were made accordingly. The leaders provided a comprehensive curriculum through their distribution and support at staff meetings of the state expectations of grade level content.

Minutes from staff meetings revealed that professional development specifically focusing on the *Four Blocks* strategies was conducted in bi-monthly staff meetings, six afternoons of professional development yearly, opportunities to hear *Four Blocks* speakers and visits to schools successfully using the *Four Blocks*. The leaders themselves regularly attended professional development on the *Four Blocks* in which they learned specifically how the instructional strategies supported the alignment of the state curriculum, instruction and assessment. In addition, the leaders attended professional development specifically intended for leaders interested in implementing the *Four Blocks* strategies building wide. The literacy specialist
received multiple days of in-servicing on the implementation of the *Four Blocks* as a literacy coach as documented by the District Curriculum Office. Supportively, the literacy specialist modeled lessons for the teachers until they had the strategies mastered.

At a classroom level, both Marzano (2003) and Reeves (2004) found effectiveness was based upon a teacher’s instructional strategies, classroom management and curriculum design, all impacted by the leadership practices. Therefore, prominent instructional strategies related to writing were also examined in this study, namely: modeling, an opportunity to write, conferencing, and sharing (e.g., Atwell, 1998; Bromley, 1998, 2002; Cambourne, 1988; Graves, 1995; Kane, 1997; Murray, 1985; Peterson, 2000; Routman, 1996; Shanahan, 1997; Vygotsky, 1978).

It is important to acknowledge these specific strategies, since such new strategies associated with effective writing instruction were utilized by the teachers in this school. Teachers used the *Four Blocks* (Cunningham & Hall, 1998) framework for writing and reading instruction. Students worked with one literacy specialist, a full time counselor, paraprofessionals and volunteers who served within the classroom to supplement a teacher’s capacity to personalize instruction. These strategies were organized into a framework of phonics, guided reading, self-selected reading, and writing components, called the *Four Blocks* (Cunningham & Hall, 1998). After being presented with options, the teachers agreed to use the *Four Blocks* framework and strategies. The School Improvement document revealed that the teachers received necessary and desired materials and professional development that supported the *Four Blocks*. Each block was studied in depth by the teachers during the bi-monthly
staff meetings. All teachers devoted two uninterrupted hours per day to literacy
instruction as defined by the Four Blocks. Books defining the format and strategies of
the Four Blocks were purchased for all staff and studied in-depth during book clubs
and staff meetings. The strategies were modeled in the classrooms for teachers.
Additional bi-monthly book clubs were led by the leaders in which the teachers
discussed related strategies from additional books that supported the school’s areas of
weakness as determined by the state assessments. In addition, state test scores were
analyzed by teachers during planning times and Four Blocks strategies were
designated to address areas of concern. Despite the difficulties that come with
change, five years later state test scores for those at or exceeding mastery in writing
were at 91.6%.

Participants

Participants meeting the criteria for participation in this study were employed
full or part-time by the school during the spring of 2007. After a review of
institutional data, the researcher identified fourteen teachers who had worked for a
least one year with the two school leaders (principal and literacy specialist), and who
consented to participate. Seven of the fourteen had ten or more years of classroom
experience. Four were hired by the new administrator. In these findings the names of
the participants have been changed and specific grade level designations have not
been included to protect confidentiality. Interviews were held at the school building
with each conversation audio taped and transcribed verbatim. Participants were given
the ability to review the contents of her or his transcript in an attempt to validate the
data through “member checking” (Creswell, 2003).
Themes

Analysis of the interview data provided two dominant categories that participants viewed as significant factors in a teacher’s ability to successfully teach writing in this school: the influence of specific leadership practices and the impact of a coherent instructional framework. Fifteen participants specifically mentioned the impact of leaders within various components of the educational environment. Likewise, fourteen of the sixteen respondents mentioned an instructional framework directly, with the remaining two individuals commenting indirectly about the framework’s impact. These two dominant categories contained six themes and several sub-themes.

The leadership influence category consisted of themes related to (1) supervision, (2) curriculum, (3) professional development and (4) knowledge of instructional components; while the instructional strategies’ impact included themes related to (1) a framework that provided coherence both inside and out of the classroom and (2) the roles of specific writing strategies. Table A1 in Appendix E contains summary data regarding which participants offered information that lead to the identification of each theme.

Leadership Themes

Leadership Theme 1: Leadership Impacts the Classroom through Supervision of Framework

Study participants were asked to reflect on whether leadership supervisory practices changed their instructional strategies. The leadership’s impact through the supervision of a coherent instructional program was expressed in two specific ways:
through persistence and material support. Each of these leadership themes will be reviewed in detail.

Leadership sub-theme 1.1: Classrooms are influenced by leaders with persistent vision. Due to students scoring below grade level on state assessments, school staff acknowledged there was a need for changes in instructional strategies. A decision had been made to use a comprehensive literacy framework of instructional strategies called *Four Blocks* (Cunningham & Hall, 1998). Study participants were asked to identify how the leaders supervised the school’s reaction. As charted in Table A1 in Appendix E, all sixteen participants indicated they understood the need for leadership supervision of a new literacy framework. Nine of these twelve participants expressed that the leadership displayed a persistent vision for this change in literacy strategies through constant communication, effort, materials, financial support, and encouragement.

The principal indicated she was determined that the school would use *Four Blocks* strategies for the next five years and that she would support it every way she could:

My role was to say ok we are going to do it [*Four Blocks*], do it 100% and what can I do to get us started and what can I do to help you ... we’re not going to waffle. This is the direction we’re going in for five years. And then we’re going to evaluate if it works or not, and if it doesn’t, then we are going to change. We aren’t going to do it half-heartedly and then say, well, that didn’t work.
The literacy specialist stated she understood the vision for *Four Blocks* from a technical standpoint; therefore, she was responsible for helping teachers learn the strategies accurately and thoroughly:

She [principal] really was the leader who said we’re going to go with this and we’re not wavering here. I was the one that got to make that happen. I was the one who really had the technical understanding, and the principal was learning it right behind me ... the principal had said, “We’re going to do this. We’re going to immerse ourselves in it and we’re going to learn it and do it really well.”

Both leaders went on to say they supervised and supported this vision by being out in the building, continually checking on the learning and the progress. The principal stated:

I do management by walking around ... I need to be modeling that I am always learning so the teachers are always learning so our culture as a school is always learning ... so I talked to teachers constantly, asking what did you see [students learning]? How did it go?

The literacy specialist indicated she also considered it important to be visible, available in the building, and aware of how the vision was being implemented:

I was out and about and around in the building a lot, in and out of classrooms, lots of conversations with teachers when they weren’t teaching, but time in the classroom when they were, model teaching, team teaching, and then having them teach and supporting them in that process. So I would say very “hands
on,” knowing what was really going on in the classroom, what it was really like for kids to be in there.

As a teacher, Mary stated she knew the school was not having favorable results with the instructional strategies they had been using and that there was now a strong, persistent vision by both leaders for new strategies that would help all students learn:

They both had a vision … before they came, we were so floundering, that I don’t know if we had any expectations at all … we just followed along. We were so happy to have somebody who had a vision, and we were so happy to have somebody that wanted high expectations for these kids and didn’t say, “Well, you know, it is an at-risk school, so I just don’t know what we can do.” Neither one of them ever felt that way. There was no reason to feel that way … they just kept pushing us and supporting us, empathizing, “Yes, we know it is hard but also, this is what research says is going to work so we need to do this.”

Liz indicated that the message about this vision was reinforced repeatedly in presentations and staff meetings: “They both have a vision of what they want the instruction to look like and they just kept presenting that to us, through presentations at staff meetings, and Reach Days, and bringing people in.”

This vision involved restructuring the classroom for Carla, who stated that this made it difficult for her at first to accept the vision for changing strategies. However, she responded to the leaders’ promises of growth for the students:
Then somebody comes in and they want to change everything, obviously, people will have a tendency to say, “Wait a minute.” She [the leader] made everybody just restructure the entire classroom and she could see the big picture at the same time, and she’d say, “You have to do this because it’s going to work well.” Those initial three years were extremely difficult. People would complain to each other, but we’d do it. We could see improvement. . . . It’s that initial restructuring that’s hard.

A common factor between Carla and Grace was that they both valued the research that the leaders provided about the instructional strategies they were going to use. Grace said: “She [leader] researched everything she wanted to accomplish . . . she did all that leg work and she was just so brilliant at putting things together and looking at all the details . . . there were no ifs, ands, or buts about it.” This research was also listed by Grace as the rationale for following the vision for new strategies:

I was thinking . . . how positive the leadership was in even bringing it to the building as a whole, that it is something that has been researched, proven it helps kids be successful in their reading and writing, so it wasn’t like, “Well, here I want you to try this,” instead she said, “This is what we are going to do, this is why and this is just what we expect to happen with the kids.”

Another individual, Amy, indicated that in her previous school district, she used whatever strategies she desired, and contrasted that with the explicit expectation that she was to use Four Blocks strategies. She stated:

I always would say to anybody here, “Oh no, I harmed those kids [in the previous school] because I wasn’t really following anything,” I didn’t feel like
I had any structure or knowledge of what to do. Teachers would get together and say, “What do you want to do for writing?” When I got here, it was do the whole Four Blocks.

The comments of Stacey and Dana indicated they clearly understood the vision and mirrored the responses of the individuals quoted above. Stacey stated that one leader had come in and said, “Let me show you what our vision is.” Similarly, Dana said, “The leader made it clear that, yes, we would [do Four Blocks] and so then everyone started doing it and we just saw this huge change.”

It is interesting to note that the leaders indicated that they knew they had to persist in this vision for these new instructional strategies because there were some who did not fully understand them or immediately desire to implement the changes. As one leader said, “In my years here, I don’t think there was anyone who didn’t try. They … listened, they tried to implement things in the classroom, but … some … went through the motions.” Another leader stated that she persisted by:

Targeting those teachers that were interested in learning, spending a lot of time and energy with them, and other people kind of feeling like they wanted some of what was going on with us. So then it blossomed that way.

Leadership sub-theme 1.2: Leaders support the classroom by providing materials. This theme emerged from study participants being asked to share about support for the vision. Eleven of the sixteen respondents reported the vision was supported through the provision of materials and resources that were needed to implement new instructional strategies in the classrooms. Both leaders saw it as
essential to provide materials for the new instructional strategies, the principal referenced this:

I did get a lot of books in … I would pay for organizational things, like little book tubs that they could organize … after professional development when they were fired up about it and figured out to use it [professional development] themselves, then I would support that.

The literacy specialist explained her role and echoed the impact that the materials had on supporting the vision in the classrooms:

Materials were huge! They [teachers] had kept four copies of trade books in their classrooms and we just put them here in the reading room and organized them with a database, then I brought the teachers in to show them what we had. I took materials into their classrooms. We integrated Four Blocks with the content areas. I would give materials!

Chris and Carla both offered similar comments about how all these materials helped them from a teaching standpoint. Chris reported that the leaders had clearly said to her that she would have the resources she needed, “This is how we are going to follow this Four Blocks framework in order to get all of these components in, and these are some resources to help you to do that.” Materials were also listed by Carla as a reason she could think more about her teaching:

I can’t tell you how extremely important it is to have someone who’s providing you with materials…. I need overheads. “Here you go.” What you need, just basic materials, for many years that was such a struggle. Can’t copy on a copy machine; … can only have so much paper. We have no money.
How do we do this then? Well, figure it out. But when you have somebody providing you with the basics, you can think about your teaching. If you're scrounging for food, shelter, and water, you are not doing the mental exercises. So that was wonderful!

The impact of materials for the vision of instructional changes was underscored by Grace. When asked the question dealing directly with support she reported that she did not even have to locate the materials by herself:

It was like ... “Let us know what you need and we will do whatever we can to get it, ... look at this catalog, maybe there are some books in here ... I marked this page, look to see if it would be helpful.” So you were not always trying to find it yourself. Someone else was helping you to locate those.

The impact of the material support for the vision was reiterated by five other individuals. Mary, Liz, John, Gayle and Karla offered similar comments about how they were provided textbooks, leveled libraries, lists of titles, authors, and themes that the reading room provided. These materials were very helpful and included several different types of books, Karla said:

We have a fantastic reading room, which has helped so much! ... There are numerous sets of books for kids to have in their hand or share with a partner. There are so many different types of books which has made planning so much easier! Some are class sets. Some are half a class set where we can partner up or even have a group reading this book or you can have them all reading different things.
The influence of materials on the study participants' support of the instructional changes is noteworthy because it was mentioned as many times as the vision for instructional changes. In addition, materials were mentioned as an organizational factor. It is interesting to note that six of the sixteen participants reported materials and checklists were helpful for organizing their classrooms and instruction. Chris said: "Leaders knew new blocks were coming in and ... having a checklist to see if you were doing it, and what we were lacking." John stated that he had received technology which helped with efficiency: "The technology [is] right there that you can use the intranet and state web site." Kate responded that she had trouble getting organized: "I tried plastic bags, I tried cubby holes in the other room... they had suggestions, they purchased boxes for me, basically it just takes materials."

Another six participants reported that they shared their materials with their colleagues often and cited this as an example of the collegiality of the building. Mary said: "We are very sharing here. This is [her] book... we are always throwing out books [to each other], throwing out resources, very open and sharing."

**Leadership Theme 2: Leadership Plays a Significant Role in Curriculum**

Study participants were asked how and to what extent the leadership influenced the curriculum being taught as defined in the state *Grade Level Content Expectations (GLCEs)*. As shown in Table A1 in Appendix E, all 16 of the study participants knew of the importance for two reasons: discussions and/or report card alignment. Each of these leadership themes will be reviewed in detail.
Leadership sub-theme 2.1: Leaders support curriculum by providing time for discussion. Knowing the curriculum was listed by a majority of the study participants as a challenge facing teachers. Eleven of the sixteen study participants credited discussions with colleagues at staff meetings and professional development meetings that were planned by their leaders as assisting them in understanding the state curriculum as defined in the GLCEs.

Three of the ten participants who reported the curriculum discussions planned by the leaders as being important stated this was because they were coming from other grade levels. Karla said: “I didn’t teach the same grade then, so I had to learn new GLCEs and …the literacy specialist helped me.”

The impact of the GLCEs discussions at the professional development meetings was evident when participants were asked how the GLCEs helped instruction. There was a wide range of responses including interpretation, expectation of mastery, time and assessment, and focus, Stacey said:

When I think about the GLCEs and Professional Development, they go hand in hand. How am I going to get there? Here are some ways. Here’s what’s happening. Here’s the newest trend. Here’s what we’ve done, we’re going to streamline.

As the teachers learned about the GLCEs, seven of the participants stated that they used their time differently. The principal noted a conversation with teachers who came to the realization that they were spending too much time on one GLCE, the leader recalled:
They came to this realization on their own, I remember the teachers said we spent four weeks on the body ... it is only one GLCE! I remember laughing because I had been thinking it for a year. This is one GLCE and they are spending 4 weeks on it, and then they came to me with the light bulb on in their head.

Carla reported the GLCEs needed to be studied so they could be mapped out; she did this with her teaching partner and said:

You get a copy of them [GLCEs] and you sit down and learn them. My partner is the same. We just have them in front of us and we check the stuff off as we did it. It's a matter of organization because you're thrown stuff to teach and you do it, and everybody is human, and part way through the year, you look at your GLCEs, and you go, "oh wow, I haven't taught this and this and I have to teach that, and I still have to fit this in, and ... I can't do that anymore because it's not my GLCE."

Gayle was influenced by the conversations about the GLCEs held at grade level meetings, as well as the resources that others shared through those discussions. She stated:

We lightly talked about them [GLCEs] at the grade level meetings ... and we went to talk with all the second grade teachers about certain things to work on and things not to work on. I know one of the schools had come up with something that they did for reading and writing for all the different semesters and quarters which was really helpful to me because then I knew which
benchmark I was hitting for that and when to do this. So that was really nice to have that laid out.

The literacy specialist noted she knew the GLCEs from reading them and when planning lessons going back to them and having conversations with teachers:

These [GLCEs] helped the school figure out what we are supposed to teach. We were excited to have it delineated as it was. It really did help to focus for me and I feel that that was true for the teachers, too.

John agreed, stating that such conversations with the literacy specialist helped him implement and understand the curriculum. He said, “Having the literacy specialist, I would go to her with questions about the GLCEs.”

Grace, Liz, Connie and Chris also offered similar comments about how discussion of the GLCEs helped in their interpretation of the curriculum. The impact of interpretation of the GLCEs, time spent on each one and mastery required were all influenced by repeated conversations with colleagues. While none of these participants characterized this experience as having an impact on at-risk students, it is interesting to note that it appears that at-risk students were influenced over time by the consistent instruction.

Leadership sub-theme 2.2: Leaders support curriculum through report card alignment. Along side the benefit of the discussion of the GLCEs, however, the alignment of the curriculum as written in the GLCEs with the report card was listed as another significant influence on the effectiveness of classroom instruction. As shown in Table A1 in Appendix E, nine of the sixteen study participants commented that the alignment between the curriculum found in the GLCEs and their report cards
supported their ability to do their job. The leaders used charts from the district's curriculum office to make sure the report cards were aligned with the *GLCEs*. The principal said:

> If we were doing what we were supposed to be doing on the charts [showing alignment], then we were aligned. We would also do a lot of work when we got the results back, looking on the strands. We did not do well on enumeration or measurement, so let's look at the *GLCEs* and see are we missing something and if our math curriculum missing something. Do I need to get you something?

The impact the *GLCE* alignment with the report card had on her teaching was noted by Mary:

> They [*GLCEs*] were made for a reason. Not just anybody’s thinking, well, you can just go teach whatever you want to teach. I believe there is validity behind them. And then the major goal is to connect it to the report card. You know, every standard has two or three *GLCEs* that go with every standard … so it is part of my job. That is what I am told to do.

Another teacher reported it was the *GLCE* alignment with the report card that influenced her effectiveness as a teacher. Amy sated:

> Here I felt like it’s more, here’s the *GLCEs* you need to obviously follow those, everything on the report card matches the *GLCEs* here, and then here is all the training you have. We have all this background here to help you prepare and further it. It was so different in my previous school. I really liked
the school there, but I feel like I'm smarter and more effective here than I was
there.

Dana said she felt bound by the GLCEs since they were aligned with the
report card: “That’s been good because we are bound by them. It tells me exactly
what I need to teach and it hasn’t been hard to get them in. They work right into Four
Blocks.”

The impact of the curriculum alignment with the report card was reiterated by
several other individuals. Chris reported that the aligning of the report card enabled
her to meet the state standards: “We always try to align our teaching up with the state
standards. The GLCEs have helped, too, because they are a little bit more visible,
they’re there, and we align our report card to follow that.” Alignment was also listed
by Liz as a way to help teachers in the classroom. “One little tiny report card item
covers a pretty deep range of items on the GLCE and so we try to get to the essence
of that and we try to see what is the important piece for kids.” Karla echoed this
rationale for support from an aligned report card: “The standards [from the state]
were on our report cards, too, so that helped.”

The impact of curriculum discussion and curriculum alignment to the report
card was underscored by Amy, who was one of five study participants who reported
that there were challenges in understanding the GLCEs. When asked the question
dealing directly with curriculum, she reported that the aligned report card helped her
match up GLCEs and goals: “There’s so many GLCEs, it’s hard to match it all up
and to figure what’s implied.”
Leadership Theme 3: Leadership Plays a Role in Professional Development

When asked whether professional development had changed their instruction, all sixteen study participants stated that professional development prepared teachers for the challenges of teaching new instructional strategies. This finding may have been expected given that the school districts are bound to ensure teacher certification as documented through credits from classes or professional development as part of NCLB. In addition, staff must complete a set number of hours of professional development for the district. However, participants identified professional development as playing a significant role in this area of impact and made clear distinctions how their professional development impacted their classroom. Both teachers and leaders were influenced by the focus they had in the meetings, the progression of the professional development, modeling both within and outside the classroom, the continuity, and the conversations about the professional development. Each of these professional development themes will be reviewed in detail.

Leadership sub-theme 3.1: Classrooms are influenced by focused professional development. Participants were given the opportunity to reflect on the professional development they had received and how it had influenced classroom practice. When asked about learning new instructional strategies through professional development, nine out of the sixteen participants responded with statements that clustered around two areas which included the focus and effort that change requires.

The literacy specialist reported that the professional development she offered was focused, concentrating on a block at a time. She stated:
We were concentrating on a block for a chunk of time. That is what our staff meetings were about. We had Reach Days and we were spending them on that. We were very focused on understanding a particular block. Staff meetings were very much professional development from the beginning.

The response given by Carla was an example of the focus and effort needed to rearrange her schema with the new strategies. She noticed:

Change hurts. Any kind of growth hurts. Your bones and your muscles hurt when you grow. And the same thing happens with your brain and with change, especially with the older teachers. You don’t want to put in all that effort, all that extra work, all that re-arranging our schema is hard to do. We had to jump in and change to *Four Blocks*. After that you tweak and you tweak constantly. In this building, we have professional development all the time, it’s just an all the time thing. It’s just a part of what you do.

Mary stated it was difficult to understand the vision at first since it was so different from the way she had been trained in college. However, after participating in the professional development; she believes this is her best teaching:

They (*Four Blocks*) were all hard for me to do the first year, the second year it got better, the third year it got better, so by the fourth year it was, ah now I get it. So the barriers are just an understanding and learning because all of the *Four Blocks* is an awesome, awesome program, but it was so contrary to what I had been taught to teach. But it is my best teaching. I look at how I taught previously, now I think about how I teach from 2000-2007 and this is the best
teaching, every year is like the best teaching that I have done. It is because of the Four Blocks!

John indicated that the professional development was focused: “We talked, focusing on anything Four Blocks. Certainly this district provides quite a bit of professional development. That is the one thing that is different than where I came from.” Likewise, the principal stated: “Support for professional development is so important; I try to give very clear focus.”

When asked how they learned about the specific aspects of the new strategies at professional development, Kathy discussed the fact the professional development started slowly, focusing on the basics for each of the Four Blocks. This focus allowed her to change gradually. As her knowledge level grew, so did her understanding and application of strategy. She said:

We got so much training and the more training we got the better we felt about it [new strategy]. We first started with Pat Cunningham and Deb Smith and then after you get the basics down, then you can build! Debbie Miller, who we got this year, was so good. Our literacy specialist would tweak things. And we went to a lot of workshops. We started slow. We would go to one on working with words; we would go to one on self-selected reading. We would go to one on guided reading, we went slowly and then once you get the basis of it then you get bigger and bigger things.

Gayle and Karla indicated that during their first year of teaching the leaders helped them learn Four Blocks for their entire year, training and teaching them. Karla

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went on to say that the professional development helped her develop as a teacher and improve each block:

I’d say last year for me was a lot of introductory stuff, but then a lot of this year has been kind of how to improve in those areas … and how to make that better than how I was doing it last year and how to go to that next step with the kids when they’re ready for it. It helped me make the *Four Blocks* better now this year.

The literacy specialist mentioned that she had intentional levels of purposes in her planning of the professional development and the impact that would have on the teachers. She said:

My main purpose was levels of purposes in the professional development I gave here. It was a top down and a bottom up approach, meaning that I am a whole, a big picture person; so the philosophy behind it was really important to me and why we are doing what we are doing and the big picture kind of stuff. Yet, I also understood that there were people who really needed to know what they were going to do when they went back into their classroom that day. So I really worked at balancing out the professional development between the big picture stuff and logical hands on.

When asked about the progression of clarifying new strategies used with *Four Blocks*, participants responded that the leaders provided so much professional development around the *Four Blocks*, Dana reported: “I don’t think you can do a program without having professional development. I know that we have certainly had
enough professional development, that any teacher here should be able to almost be an expert at *Four Blocks.*”

**Leadership sub-theme 3.2: Modeling is an important aspect of professional development.** During the process of reflecting on how he or she came to understand the new strategies, five respondents indicated that the modeling played a significant role in their professional development.

The principal indicated that, while planning professional development, her goal was to model during the meetings that the purpose of the meeting was to clearly focus on the strategies she expected to see in her classroom observations. She stated:

So when I did a staff meeting or professional development, I wanted it to be crystal clear, this is what we are doing and why, today we are really going to work on guided reading, how you do a guided reading lesson, what is the before, during, after, why do you do it. We will get down to why you connect it and everything else, later but let’s do it right.

The literacy specialist reported that the professional development she offered was modeled, concentrating on a block at a time. She stated:

One of the things we did was we decided that we were really going to get good at guided reading, so we focused that year on guided reading. All of our professional development was on the guided reading block, I went in and modeled and then the second half of the year we did writing. We did self-selected reading and working with words, but it was systematic.

The modeling during professional development helped Stacey see the strategies and how they work and then do them in her classroom. She explained:
The principal would come into the classroom and say, "Do you need any modeling?" Then the literacy specialist would model and say, "This is what we see.... This is how we work." So we can see it, we can hear it, and then we do it.

The modeling done for professional development also impacted the effectiveness of the strategies being taught. Amy indicated the literacy specialist would come in and teach a lesson and let us observe her and take notes: "Just seeing somebody do it makes it a lot easier. And I think the entire staff as a whole believes in it so much that we really have no way out when you see how beneficial it [the strategy] is."

In addition, the principal provided her staff opportunities to gain understanding for the *Four Block* framework by watching it done at a school with an even greater at-risk population:

One of the most powerful things we did I researched schools around here that were doing *Four Blocks*, 100% free and reduced lunch, poverty area and I took first, second and third grade teachers over there, and they watched their particular grade level room. They watched kids way more poor and way worse off than our kids; so that attitude that they can't do it or they don't have any parent support, or no one reads to them at night, can be alleviated. You can see they can read at grade level in first grade. And this school is not as nice as our school. They don't have a bazillion materials either. Every excuse in the book is checked off: not age appropriate, not developmentally appropriate, don't have materials, all the stuff you hear. That was good for them because
they got to see teachers doing it and see the kids learning it and at grade level. That was very powerful.

Grace was influenced by the offer from the leaders for teachers to observe other teachers: “I have never been offered the opportunity to leave to observe something that was working in another district. That was huge; three of us went over for the day.”

**Leadership sub-theme 3.3: Professional development that impacts classrooms is continuous and on-going.** This theme emerged from study participants as they were asked to discuss their purpose in participating in professional development. Eight of the study participants told how they were life-long learners and that as professionals they knew they always had to learn more and enjoyed doing so. Having leaders who provided continuous and on-going professional development opportunities was important.

Kate echoed how incredible it was that the leaders provided an abundance of professional development which gave her time to implement strategies:

The leaders provided us oodles and oodles of in-service and speakers and the ability to go somewhere and listen to it. It was fantastic. It slowly gave us time to implement it. It wasn’t like you are doing this right now. It was like take a breath until you feel comfortable with it and go with it until finally you are on board.

The impact of continuous professional development was reiterated by several other individuals. Grace said: “I liked having personal growth as an educator, looking for maybe new ways to deliver the material.” Continuous professional
development was also listed by Carla as a reason she continued to change: “To stay fresh, to stay current, to get new ideas, because particularly, as you teach for many years, you can’t get stuck. You always have to be changing; you always have to be improving.” Kate echoed this rationale that professional development reminded her of strategies she had forgotten as well as taught her new ones: “That’s something I meant to try and I didn’t have a chance to, … just new ideas of how to do things because there’s only so much you get from just the books they have on Four Blocks.”

Two other individuals, Kathy and Amy, reported that the professional development was significant in their ability to be effective teachers because they always could benefit from learning more. Kathy reported that professional development both reinforced and taught new things:

My main goal going in to it is to just get new ideas, whatever the subject is, if we’re learning something on writing, to just get some new ideas and just reinforcing what I’m doing. It’s nice to hear how it should be done, or the most beneficial ways students learn best by doing this, and then the reinforcement of, yes, I am doing that.

Likewise, Amy stated, “It doesn’t even have to do with whether you are lacking in an area, I don’t think it ever hurts you to learn a little bit more. I constantly want to learn more!”

Karla indicated that professional development was continuously helping her improve in the Four Blocks strategies; each professional development she went to was something that was going to help her with Four Blocks:
The nice part was that they always told me that it would take a few years for me to get completely comfortable. So if they come in and observe a lesson and I'm missing a part, they are not going to make me feel bad about it, they are going to say to me, “Okay, here’s the part you need to work on. Here’s the part you did really well.” They let me know that I’ve improved in an area, and they always give me something to work on.

_Leadership sub-theme 3.4: Sharing after professional development supports new strategies._ During the process of reflecting on how she or he came to implement new knowledge from professional development experiences, participants reported that the professional development was influential in changing their strategies. Ten of the sixteen respondents indicated that sharing with their colleague played a significant role in their use of the new strategies. Mary stated:

> We work together as a team really, really well. If I don’t understand something, I am going to ask. I am not going to sit here and flounder through the whole thing. And most of the time, as children find out, when you ask a question, there are about five others who have the same question. Sometimes I feel like I am just hanging on by a thread, but we support each other. We talk before school a couple of times a week just informally and I find that we are pretty supportive of each other. Have you come up with any bright ideas for this?

The study participants also believed that sharing at staff meetings held them accountable as the principal asked them to report on their experiences with learning about and using the strategies. One went on to say that attendance at the professional
development, combined with reporting responsibilities, served individuals and colleagues well. Mary said:

It was a known that if you were going to go anywhere, plan on coming back to present at the following staff meeting and you will, so don’t think that you won’t. So if you knew you were going to go somewhere you better make sure you take good notes because you are not going to come back and say, oh, that was great. It is going to be … how we can use this in our classroom. So there was never a wasted conference. Everybody was going to hear what you did.

Likewise, Liz stated: “Anyone who went to anything about Four Blocks was pretty much expected to come back and share it with everyone who didn’t get to go.”

Since all the staff organized their teaching using the Four Blocks, they had a common instructional framework that allowed their sharing to be meaningful because it was focused on specific strategies. Carla said:

We share … most of us have worked together for such a long time and most of us are so professional and focused on the right things here, that we go back and forth between classrooms, between grade levels. I can’t think today, “Boy, what have you got for this activity, do you have any new ideas? That’s a great thing on your wall, what did you do there?” You go into somebody’s room in this building and you’re looking at walls. You’re getting ideas, you’re thinking, “Oh I’ve done that, but I like what they’ve done there. I’m going to go try that.” We’re constantly giving.

Many study participants stated that the leader-led book clubs were a particularly popular form of professional development in which staff shared with each
other their understanding of strategies that were described in the literature and implemented in the Four Blocks framework. Karla explained it this way: “Our focus this year has been on vocabulary with those [book clubs]. We spend a lot of time discussing and reading books about how to improve the children’s vocabulary.” Kate cited that book clubs helped her build on her previous learning:

For me, it’s learning more about how to build on what I’m already doing in a lot of things and how to continuously get better and try new ways of doing it that might work with the kids better than some of the ways that I’ve already tried.

The impact of professional development on the strategies used by the study participants was underscored by ten of the study participants who stated formal planning time after a professional development experience supported the implementation of the new strategies. Dana said all the time planning the use of the new strategies has resulted in great results for the school:

The literacy specialist always tells me, “Don’t say this to anybody else but it [Four Blocks] is time intensive.” It is. The planning I think. But it’s all worthwhile. When you see the results, you know I’m still amazed to where we have come, from the bottom of the heap and now we’re at the top.

Other participants reported that time to plan provided a time to think about the strategies, discuss them with colleagues and fit things together. Liz reported how helpful that planning time was: “Just time, time to plan, to think things through.” Chris said she valued those times: “To plan and do it [Four Blocks], or look through the resources and things.” Likewise, Carla indicated that she could become
overwhelmed after professional development and needed time to fit things together.

She said:

You don’t know where to fit in it sometimes, there’s just so much, it can be mentally overwhelming to bring a piece back and think, alright, how do I keep what I know I have to keep and add this piece to it? Do I have to change something, or do I have to find room to fit it in?

It is interesting to note that of the sixteen study participants, six indicated they created informal planning times which were spontaneous conversations before school, during lunch and after school for planning how to use the new strategies. The individuals identified that these conversations with colleagues were key in their development professionally. These brief, unplanned conversations about strategies enabled them to try new strategies, to improve their techniques and required colleagues who were available and willing to share. Grace said:

Probably more happens before or after school or in the hallway when you have a question and someone is telling about what they have tried … and it tends to be what you see in someone’s classroom when you are going over something curriculum-wise or lesson plan-wise … or when someone stops and says what was that again or needs a clarification on something.

Karla stated that when she wants to discuss what she learned at a professional development opportunity, she talked to her colleagues: “I like to talk to my colleagues first.” Gayle indicated she will say to her colleagues: “Something about this [instructional strategy] went well or this didn’t go well.” Mary stated there were numerous conversations, almost non-stop: “Perpetually, we are always talking about
it, before school, after school.” Stacey talks to others whenever she can and tells her colleagues: “You know I found this works! “

The leaders’ expectation that the literacy framework with its common language and strategies was to be utilized by all teachers encouraged professional conversations. Carla indicated that the professional development required continual adjustment by all. She said:

All the little actions that a teacher does and all the little things that a teacher says make a huge difference on whether this is a concept that the kids learn or not. I like to keep watching people, I like to keep reading about it, I just like to feed on it a lot because I don’t think I’m done tweaking and fixing … I did it this morning and then I run it over to my colleague who is using the same strategies, “This is what it looked like for me”, “OK, I will try it.” …that goes on for a while and we build together.

It is interesting to note that both formal and informal sharing helped the study participants grow, adjust, and use the new strategies. This follow up was frequently mentioned, as was the impact of the writing instructional strategies themselves.

Leadership Theme 4: Knowledgeable Leaders Impact Instructional Strategies

All study participants were asked to reflect on the writing success in terms of the knowledge of their leaders. The sixteen study participants acknowledged the leaders had to be and were knowledgeable sources for answers to their questions about writing and used them as resources.
The impact the knowledgeable leaders had on her implementation of new strategies was noted by Stacey. Knowledgeable leaders had not been part of her past experience, she stated:

I cannot imagine not having my leader be knowledgeable. She had the vision, she has information. I have worked for principals that have not known the knowledge, the subject matter of the curriculum. And they leaned on us. Well, she made it her business to go out, that’s the key. She didn’t expect me to do something that she had no knowledge of. And if I had a question, she’s another resource. That’s a big one, too.

Knowledgeable leaders were also identified by Dana as a significant support in the process of learning new strategies. She mentioned:

The literacy specialist, as far as I’m concerned… is an expert at *Four Blocks*. She truly is. You could ask her any question. She has gone to enough leadership type, professional development, to find out exactly what we need to know. So that’s a huge part in it, is having somebody that is knowledgeable. And the principal, she went to all the blocks. I don’t think it was necessarily a principal professional development time, but she chose to go and find out as much as she could so that she could help us in anyway.

The principal also took the time to learn all the strategies within the framework. According to Karla, the principal knew everything the literacy specialist knew:

I would go to her with a question if the literacy specialist was unavailable and she [principal] would have the answer, without having to go look it up or tell
me that she would have to get back to me. And she would write in the observation, “Here’s what you did well on, here’s what you need to work on.”

She was always very knowledgeable.

Two distinct examples in which knowledgeable leaders provided support during the transition to new strategies were provided by Chris and John. Chris said:

The leaders would come and see if you were doing the instruction correctly.

Although most people I think were on-board with the changes happening and wanting to do better, I think having our leaders come around and check and see an idea, are you doing it correctly?

John stated that when he wanted to discuss what he had learned in professional development he wouldn’t be fearful to ask either one of them:

Just to have there a person to ask questions to, to have that piece there. So I think the principal is not just the disciplinarian but they can also answer questions, too. The principal was very knowledgeable and I am always one, whenever I saw the literacy specialist, if I had any questions, I would go right to her immediately.

The literacy specialist impacted teachers in a variety of ways as they learned about *Four Blocks*. Liz said: “The literacy specialist was very well trained, very well prepared and she threw herself into it and she lived and breathed it. That was really important.” Grace described the literacy specialist as being helpful with reminders, notes, and resources connected to the professional development:

She was a great one to bounce things off from. She would ask, “How was this, how did this go?” She was always a great resource particularly for the reading
writing piece to offer suggestions. Remember that part at the workshop, you can’t find it in your notes, she would apt to be able to say I think it is in this section and I have got what you need, I will try to put a copy in your box.

Gayle mentioned that her understanding of *Four Blocks* was influenced by the literacy specialist showing her where to fit in new strategies:

The literacy specialist is really good with when she brings new ideas in; really letting us know how it works into *Four Blocks*. It might not necessarily be a *Four Blocks* strategy, but she was really good with letting us know how to incorporate it into our teaching.

A variation on this theme was offered by the principal who reported it was her decision to be knowledgeable about *Four Blocks*. The principal stated that she desired to model that she, too, was willing and eager to learn:

I need to be modeling that I am always learning, so the teachers are always learning, so our culture as a school is always learning.... We needed to show kids that the focus here is learning. We don’t run in the hallways because kids are learning in the classroom. It wasn’t all about because I said so; this is the way the school is run because we don’t want to interrupt learning wherever it was going on. I changed the schedule around to make things better for learning.

The literacy specialist stated that teachers had to hear the strategies many times before they were internalized, thus her knowledge helped her teach the strategies in different ways:
You need to say things over and over again in different ways.... I would think we have got it. We have done guided reading for a certain amount of time and it sounds like we know what we are doing, but I would go in a classroom and say, “Yikes, it is not right, we don’t have it yet. We still have a long way to go.

The impact of knowledgeable leaders on instructional strategies is further explored in the following section. Due to the insight and depth of knowledge that the leaders had about the instructional strategies they knew specifically how to support such a coherent literacy framework. The impact of this framework and strategies is further explored in the following section.

Instructional Strategies’ Themes

When asked about how the instructional strategies used by teachers had changed over the last six years, all sixteen responded this was an area of growth. The staff had decided their previous methods were not working and had decided to change their instructional strategies and to use the *Four Blocks* literacy framework (see Table A1 in Appendix E). This new framework uses a structure for instructional strategies that is balanced, multi-level and multi-method. Each block is done for a thirty minute time and has a particular format that all the staff learned. Each block: phonics, guided reading, self-selected reading, and writing is done every day. This organization for teachers was new and required an every day commitment to use several different strategies.

Participants identified these new instructional strategies as playing significant roles in two main aspects of the classroom instruction. The first theme consists of
participants' perceptions regarding the impact of a coherent framework. They believed that such a framework connected strategies and helped them to organize their instruction and make it multi-level for all kinds of students, including at risk.

The second theme deals with the students benefiting from four approaches to literacy. The use of four varied approaches benefits all types of learners, including those who learn literacy skills best through the use of phonics, guided reading, self selected trade books, or their own writing. In addition, at-risk students received the benefit of multi-method instruction.

**Instructional Strategy Theme 1: A Framework Organizes the Instructional Strategies**

When asked to describe ways in which they grew during the five years, twelve of the sixteen participants indicated that they had grown professionally through the use of this coherent four block structure. In addition to the impact of their leaders, study respondents indicated that instructional programming had played a significant role in improving their students' writing ability. This happened through the use of consistent instructional strategies that were linked, varied, and ranged in level of difficulty.

The leaders were committed to the organization, format and consistency that the framework provided. The principal stated:

The impact for using the strategies everyday was huge, when moving to *Four Blocks* you teach writing every day! I still had to monitor when you are doing writing. Ok, you are doing it at 10:00 so I will be there ...that is hard for teachers if they don’t like writing, they don’t teach writing every day and come up with good ideas. For us to deal with our MEAP scores, we had to
come up with a structure. These kids have so little organization in their lives, they come to school for organization and we realize that big time.

The response given by the literacy specialist was an example of how important a structured framework was and included consideration of how the reading and writing balance came together. She mentioned:

I was the one who really had the technical understanding, and the principal was learning it right behind me. So that just her understanding of it made her say “I just want to teach this, it looks like so much fun.” She was learning it as a teacher, as in what do I expect to see and what are we not doing now? And how can we change it to do it? And I was very strictly *Four Blocks*...it was very regimented for me. One of the things we did was implement it [*Four Blocks*] in a pure form and we implemented it totally.

While several of the respondents who mentioned the framework gave classroom visits as the means through which their understanding of the framework grew, other study participants specifically mentioned the role the time commitment played in their students’ growth. This implementation was impacted through classroom visits which occurred regularly. Visiting the classrooms the principal would observe the strategies, and then ask the literacy specialist if that was how it was supposed to work. This helped her to constantly learn about the instructional strategies and whether they were done correctly. The leader would ask the students about the lesson as well to see if they get the “gist.” Kate recalled these visits by the leaders:
They came into the classrooms. At first teachers were a little intimidated that they were being observed but they [leaders] were relaxed about it, they were low key, coming in and spot checking us to make sure we were on target. They made reading a priority. K-2 in the morning, 3-5 in the afternoon for Language Arts, in the beginning when we had paraprofs available, the paraprofs were available for Language Arts to work in the classrooms to keep the kids more on tract. We were not allowed to have any specials that would break up Four Blocks, so that we wouldn’t skip a block. It was emphasized that we do those blocks everyday.

Liz credits the leaders for seeing if teachers understood the strategies of the Four Blocks vision and how to implement them:

She was really very supportive, there was a time when the literacy specialist came around and had a some kind of a checklist and then tallied all the results from all the classrooms and presented that at staff meeting so we could all see in each block how we were doing and what trends there were, if we were all sloughing off on this or that or if we all, I wouldn’t say sloughing off, but if we hadn’t quite processed and implemented any particular part and then she saw something really neat going on she would also share that. I think she and the principal came in together each block.

Classroom visits by the leaders were also listed by John as an important influence on his growth in the use of the new strategies: “The principal was visible in the classrooms daily. So you knew what was expected with the principal, this was your Four Blocks time.” Each block was viewed as essential and supportive of the
others. These visits to observe the specific blocks were also informally done by the literacy specialist who offered support for each block in other ways. She said:

It included lots of hallway conversations, ideas, and lots of being available to them and encouraging them. There was lots of talk about what [strategies] they were doing in their classrooms and they wanted my blessing or my ideas. They’d go back and do it, and then they’d come back and say how it went.

Mary reported that initially each block was challenged to learn but that she understood the structure was key to success and that each block was essential:

No, just it was once again, like I said with each all three, it was just learning to do the block, learning to add your own creativity to it, but sticking to what the structure of the block is. You can’t mess with the structure. Once you get going you can go your own way but if you mess with the structure, then the block is not going to succeed the way it was meant to succeed. And because I am so literal, I do exactly what I was told to do, what it says I do, that is what I do.

In addition, Stacey reports her perspective as a teacher on the structure and training necessary to learn new strategies. She stated:

Well, the principal, first of all, was the leader. And without strong leadership you cannot do anything. She provided a structure of the day that allowed us to have one that blends in with the Four Blocks, but she provided us with the structure and the training. And in showing us with the training, we all bought in to the program with her. And until everyone buys in, it’s not going to fly.
Each block was done everyday; therefore, scheduling was an important component and was provided by the leaders. The leaders scheduled times for the *Four Blocks* of instruction to occur. Chris acknowledged that the principal had their schedules set: “They knew the time was available.” Kate stated: “This also meant there was no interruption with specials, and paraprofs were available to the teachers in the room at that time.”

In a similar fashion, Chris indicated she was sure about the value *Four Blocks* placed on the time commitment. She said:

I think an important component of it is *Four Blocks* is going to spend a good solid two hours that you need, and it should be a good solid two hours of uninterrupted time. And the principal made sure that would happen in terms of scheduling. I think that was really important, that you had at least two hours of uninterrupted time.

When asked about the scheduling that the leaders provided for the teachers, the principal noted that it was a good thing they value organization:

They would hate me if they didn’t like structured things. I would sit with them in August and say ok this is how I visualize your day, you have your specials first thing then you have the entire morning, block out there is no special, there is nothing, so this is what I visualize, you have got 9:15-9:45 special, 9:45 to 10:30 is your writing, 10:30 to 11 is your words. I blocked it until 12:30 for lunch, then you have an hour for math, what do you think? I blocked out the entire day, five days a week, so there was ‘no I can’t do that.’ I have it in writing exactly what they were doing every day and there was time for all
*Four Blocks* and an hour to an hour and a half for math and all their specials. Everything was right there. Fortunately this staff likes that.

Kate reported that she now teaches writing everyday after having her *Four Blocks* schedule set by the principal. She stated:

Doing *Four Blocks* has made me do writing on a daily basis, this was my least favorite blocks and if I had to give something up it would probably be that because writing comes difficult for me. But this is what we have to do, so it forces me to, so that now I feel comfortable with it.

Likewise, Liz found the *Four Blocks* program offered strategies within an organized framework. She reported: “Those strategies were valued because everyone was supposed to be on board with the same program. Those were supported and looked for when we were observed.”

**Instructional Strategy Theme 2: Instructional Strategies Have Roles in Writing Instruction**

When asked to describe the roles of the instructional strategies, all sixteen participants indicated that they had understood the roles due to the professional development that they had received on the strategies.

*Instructional sub-theme 2.1: Phonics instruction improved word analysis and leadership guidance was important for teachers.* When asked if the phonics block had helped their students’ writing, many teachers said it had. Nine teacher respondents indicated the block had improved their students’ word awareness and analysis. Amy noted that she saw that her students using the word wall and circling words:

If they don’t understand it, you just start to see prefixes, suffixes, parts of the words that they’re using now in their writing. And so as a teacher, it’s great
because you’re seeing the connections and the transfer from what you do into their writing.

Grace also found the phonics block was instrumental in helping her students make a successful transition into becoming writers. The difference was the word wall where she was required to post words with spelling patterns and sounds and spend time studying and reviewing it everyday with the students. Grace said:

The word wall was able to help students look for word chunks; I think that was probably one of the stronger blocks that made a difference especially with writing. Because they come in with letters and sounds in place and helping them to know that what they know about that, they can start to write words at least get close to that with beginning and ending sounds.

Three other individuals -- Liz, Chris, and Gayle -- were also impressed by the support the word wall gave their students. Liz mentioned she too saw a lot more correct spelling off word wall words: “It is amazing how many words they can spell correctly.” Chris stated: “We tell the kids that these are the words that are popping up all over in their books and their writing so that kind of bridges things together.” Gayle said: “We have a ton of high frequency words on the wall that a lot of the kids will write, and they’ll turn around and look and make sure they have it spelled correctly.”

Carla indicated that the phonics block was key in her students’ growth in writing and reading. She noted it helps with spelling when the students understand the word chunks and start using them in their writing:

You can read it [their writing] so much better! When they can read their own reading better, they can revise better. So it’s just like a domino effect. When
they start chunking words and understanding the semantics… then they are able to read more fluently. And when they are chunking for meaning, then they start picking up vocabulary more and figuring out what words mean and it helps with the thinking while we’re reading.

Kate described how, even though the school did not have formal spelling instruction:

I see improvement on their spelling. Like in the word day, I don’t notice the ay so much as I used to because it is automatically word wall. Spelling patterns that we work with, I think help them carry a pattern to other words.

The impact of the phonics block on writing took place also at a deeper level. Mary discovered that the most significant impact on her students’ word knowledge was due to her knowledge. Upon reflecting on that growth experience she discovered that:

When I think about how I first taught words and how I now teach words, I go so much more in depth now because I have the background knowledge to do it. When I first started teaching it, I taught it very basic and very literally. Now I get deeper into each of the words! And the more they [the students] know that you know about it [words] the more they want to know. If they think that you are really turned on by the words block, then they are too!

The literacy specialist indicated that the phonics block was instrumental in providing good structure for phonics instruction:

I don’t think before we had phonics instruction other than what teachers came knowing probably what they were taught that wasn’t strong….The
introduction of the word block was phonics instruction where we are actually learning about words, reading at the word level, decoding at the word level and writing at the word level...it beefed up our instruction.

The literacy specialist mentioned that the hard part of the phonics block for teachers is transferring, so that the fun word activities don’t become the focus and the intent is lost. She spent time at in-services expressing the need for teachers to know why they were doing the word activities with their students:

There are a lot of fun activities that kids love, like the “Mind Reader”... We need to know why we do what we do ... if we are not doing the words block correctly there is no reason to do it ... teachers need to know why we are doing the fun activities and if they don’t understand it, then it is just a fun activity and it doesn’t promote learning.

Amy spoke about her interactions with students and how those had grown from dealing with a single word and the transfer to include writing.

In figuring out the working with words block, it’s more than just, “you’ve got this word wrong here.” But you’re constantly working with parts of the words and you start to see it in their writing. And so as a teacher, it’s great because you’re seeing the connections and the transfer from what you do into their writing.

Likewise, Carla mentioned her perspective on phonics was changed as a result of the using the elements found in the words block: “You have to follow certain elements...or the kids aren’t going to transfer. And it’s that transfer at the end that is the key to it all.”
Instructional sub-theme 2.2: Guided reading teaches writing structures and comprehension. When asked to describe whether the guided reading block helped their students become better writers, eight of the sixteen participants indicated that their students had grown through the focus in guided reading on comprehending text structures and quality writing.

John reported that being exposed to quality text that included the traits of strong writing impacted his students. As he read with his students he would say to them:

That [piece] had a good voice, and you try to bring that into writing. Or boy, the author really used good word choice here; you do that with both self-selected and guided reading, both have pieces of writing when you can give kids examples of what it [good writing] looked like.

Similarly, Karla mentioned how exposure to strong writing impacted her students: “We use a lot of the stories to show good writing, so they can see this is what the author did to grab your attention at the beginning of the story. We can work on that in our writing.” Gayle reported that during guided reading she would say to her students: “You know, here’s a spot where the author used this, and here’s a spot where the author used this. These are things we talk about in writing during the guided reading block.”

Mary stated that the guided reading literature was a significant resource for her students. According to her, students would use it as a springboard for writing different structures:
You didn’t know how exciting a biography could be until you read about
Mary McLeod Bethune or Christa McCullough! Then all of a sudden, you
realize there are some very important people out there who did some really
exciting things! So now when I write about my own biography, I don’t have to
write about the whole thing. The Christa McCullough story was about one
little section of her life and so a biography does not always mean [ages] 0-99.
It could be about 7-9 or 3-6, things I could learn, that were valuable at the
time. They [students] learned to write different types of genre by the genre
they are being exposed to in guided reading and what does it really mean
…once you understand what the genre is, it helps you diversify your writing.

Carla also mentioned that she felt her students learned about text structure in
the guided reading block. Their growth was a result of her intent for the lesson and
tying together writing and reading. She stated:

We pick certain pieces for them to read that demonstrate how we want them to
write. And even if we don’t tell them, they start telling us, “Oh, this is like …
oh this is compare/contrast … this is chronological order.” And when we’re
talking about something in writing, and we’re having guided reading, we’ll
talk about it in our guided reading, “Look at this lead. Is that a good lead?”

You just can’t separate it. You chose your material with intent that it’s not just
saying, “I want to do that story,” you have a specific purpose. What are you
teaching? Over the years, you juggle it so that what you’re teaching in writing
is close to what you’re teaching in reading at the same time.
Similarly, Amy indicated that learning about text structure and writing elements in guided reading transferred to her students’ writing. She said:

My kids are on this simile thing right now, where they keep pulling out similes and I’m starting to see that in their writing. So they will see similes in the reading and then transfer it. They are just so excited about it … but it’s things that they are transferring over as they are becoming a writer and they are writing for a reason. I was working on the endings, and it’s those things that they can see in their reading, and they can start to transfer it into their writing.

Liz stated that she ties reading and writing together intentionally: “Sometimes we will study nonfiction writing and nonfiction reading at the same time or poetry in guided reading and writing… their writing will be more fully developed if they have seen it in reading as well.”

The literacy specialist said that the reciprocal process with reading and writing was a result of teachers being more purposeful with the reading and writing blocks and this resulted in creating better writers at the school:

Being purposeful about our instruction and taking time to practice that instruction during guided reading, then their [students’] level of understanding of text and what to do with text increased and the more you read, the better writer you are. We just increased the amount of text kids read, the level they think about it, the depth they practice it.

**Instructional sub-theme 2.3: Self-selected reading teaches vocabulary and genre.** When asked about self-selected reading, several teachers stated that exposure
to print helped their students become better writers by exposing them to vocabulary and genre. It is interesting to note that of the sixteen study participants, eight indicated that books from the reading room were an excellent resource for this exposure. John said the literacy leader was responsible for the book room, “You know one thing that was just wonderful about what our literacy specialist did is our book room we have.” Liz added the leaders were really good about coming to teachers every year and they would ask: “What books do you need?’ and then we were able to get thematic science and social studies thematic book sets. They were really good about providing materials to continue growing the library.” Karla noted also what a wonderful resource the book room was for the school: “the more you read the better writer you are going to be, the strongest writers in my class are the ones that score off the chart, so you know they read all the time.”

Gayle stated this exposure during self-selected also helped with spelling words correctly:

I was spelling office and I looked at it and it looked wrong and I put an extra f in and then it looked right. Seeing that and seeing it over and over and over, I think it really helps them just being able to notice that wait a second, that’s not the way I usually see that word, how do I change it to make it look right?

The challenge of keeping the book room full of a variety of books was mentioned by the literacy specialist, she said:

Books are always a barrier. You can always use more books. We had a certain level of books. Our books are wearing out and you use money to replace them.
I am in two schools now so I haven’t done that. What I did for self-selected reading is update baskets, go through them, and add more every year.

Vocabulary growth during self-selected reading was mentioned by several participants; Carla indicated that her students’ use of sticky notes in the self selected block was a key component in developing her students’ vocabulary. She said:

Students write on them certain things that they come across in their reading. Vocabulary is huge, and writing elements like dialogue and similes, they love to point them out to you and they love to sticky those. You kind of have to tell them that they can’t show you all the time because they get so excited about it.

Amy noted that vocabulary growth occurs during self-selected reading because her students were constantly telling her about new words. She said:

Students were finding vocabulary words, things they are pulling up into their writing. They have little yellow notepads that they can take with them while they are doing their self selected reading, so if they find something interesting they can jot it down quick. If they find a word that they think is interesting or something they’ve never heard of before, they can jot it down.

The impact of self-selected reading on writing development was evident when teachers responded by mentioning genre. Grace noted that:

Sometimes when I do the read aloud you can sometime connect that to what else you are doing in curriculum area or something like Susie was doing in writing or doesn’t that sound like step by step directions. Or genre.

Karla mentioned that her read-aloud was her opportunity to point out the variety of genre that authors use. She said:
I will kind of point out where authors do certain things, I think the self-selected block helps with the different things that kids can read, here's the read-a-loud, what genre is this, these are all the different types of writing available, it doesn't have to aliens that went to Mars and ate all the people. They can write a biography, they can write a mystery.

Mary reported that she exposed her students to lots of different writing genre through the choices she offered them before they begin reading in the self-selected reading time. She said:

They are exposed to lots of different genres through choices. Of course before they go to their self-selected reading, they meet on the floor with me for 5-10 minutes with a different genre and I describe the genre. Once again, exposure to all the different types of writing that is out there.

*Instructional sub-theme 2.4: Students are influenced by purposeful writing instruction modeled daily.* When asked if the writing block helped their students become better writers, ten of the sixteen responded that this was an area of growth due to a structure that included daily modeling, conferencing and sharing.

The response given by Kate was an example of how the daily requirement of a thirty minute writing block helped her and students become writers. She said:

Doing *Four Blocks* has made me do writing on a daily basis. This was my least favorite block and if I had to give something up it would probably be that because writing comes difficult for me. But this is what we have to do, so it forces me to so that now I feel comfortable with it.
Liz said she finds that her students are producing more writing in addition to writing with a purpose:

The students are writing tons more than they used to write and the structure of the writing block gives them the time and a real focus, the sequence of lessons, consistency in the lessons, the practicing, that it is something very important and I feel it is very beneficial.

Carla reported that initially she did not have a structure for teaching writing. But after watching the literacy specialist model a mini-lesson, conferencing while students wrote, and having students share their writing, she now had a meaningful structure: “She [literacy specialist] was able … to change my entire schema of how to teach writing, and that was the important point. She gave me a basic structure of how to teach.” Likewise, Grace mentioned her change in schema and how being exposed to a writing structure helped her and her students:

Parents often think writing is handwriting or spelling, I think back to those first few years of teaching and I think “Oh my gosh, I don’t think I taught them how to write” I got so bogged down in copying from the board, and I look now at what they are doing and I think those poor children [in the past] why didn’t I give them this opportunity?

Dana said that she and her students had both grown in their writing ability due to her modeling of writing during the mini-lesson and conferencing. She mentioned:

Doing that mini-lesson at the beginning has been very, very helpful for me. Writing is probably where I struggle the most, I always think that I’m not a good writer. Having to think ahead to what am I going to teach and maybe
doing a little bit of writing has helped me become...I think the writing block has helped me to become a better writer. Then at conferencing time when you are going around and just seeing and pulling kids and helping, we make so much time in those blocks for one-on-one time with the students that I think that has made a big impact on them.

Amy also indicated that the mini-lesson at the beginning of the block taught her students skills that were not taught in her previous school. She stated:

With the *Four Blocks*, we constantly have a purpose, which at my previous school it would be, “Here. You are going to write. Go at it.” We journaled every day there. But here, I realize, wow, we give the kids their purpose so that they know what is expected of them. Where I didn’t do that at my previous school, they didn’t have a purpose every day for their writing

Mary mentioned that the mini-lesson exposed her students to all kinds of writing. She said:

You are constantly teaching a short quick lesson about what it is they are going to be writing about and so once again you are exposing them to all the types of writing ... funny thing is, when I come back to the kids and talk to them about what it is I learned and how we are going to do this and do that. Most of them, a couple of them that don’t like to work will groan, but most of them are going “Ok, let’s learn it, let’s see what it is like. Let’s try it out and see what is happening.” They are doing an excellent job. I see this whole year where we have focused on writing, our scores will be so much better than in the fall!
The impact of conferencing on writing growth for students took place during the conversations Stacey would have with her students while they practiced. She said:

The conferencing during the writing block gives her an opportunity to sit down with her students one on one. I critique but teach “Why did you do this? Why did you do that? How did that help you?” We give all of these small little lessons, of course we do the mini lessons and I focus on those, but I can also go farther with the writing while the kids are working.

In addition Grace reports that the sharing her students did during the last minutes of the writing block impacted her students’ writing skills:

Sharing their writing shows there is an audience, this isn’t something I am just writing and no one is every going to hear it but it gives them a chance to let their friends know what they have written. And they are usually attentive during that time; too, they want to hear what someone else has written.

Both leaders noticed the impact of daily writing on the students. The principal noted that before Four Blocks “our kids weren’t writing” and the literacy specialist said that now the teachers were modeling every day, purposeful instruction:

Before, there wasn’t writing going on. If there was, it was very programmed, it was journal writing, but we were not teaching kids how to write and showing them how writers think and making connections between books. So I think the depth of what we were teaching [impacted writing] because of our understanding of genre, authors, reading and writing connection all impacted student writing.
Summary

Two major themes emerged from this study (see Table 1 at the end of this chapter): the influence of specific leadership practices and the impact of coherent classroom instruction. Study participants identified these two components as being instrumental in the professional growth experienced by each during their tenure at the school, and how these helped lead to increased test scores in writing and other subjects.

While neither of the two dominant themes in this study match the specific terminology used by Reeves (2004), it is interesting to note the connections between his language and the themes and sub-themes of this research. Reeves suggested accountability for learning could be positively impacted by a successful interaction between the school leaders and teachers. Sub-themes dealing with materials, report cards, and phonics instruction, along with major themes such as leaders providing professional development and an instructional framework raise questions concerning the degree to which these components of Reeves' model are present in this research. The results of this study lead to a discussion concerning the appropriateness of using Reeves' theory as a lens to describe the experience of these teachers, which is also presented in Chapter 5.

One of the two dominant themes in this study does match the specific terminology used by Cunningham and Hall (1998) in their *Four Blocks* framework. It is interesting to note the connections between their language and the themes and sub-themes of this research. Cunningham and Hall suggested these individual blocks each positively impacted literacy and gave administrators a checklist of things to look for.
The model was followed closely and the administrators used the checklists developed by Cunningham and Hall. The results of this study lead to a discussion concerning the appropriateness of using the *Four Blocks* framework as a lens to describe the experience of these teachers and the need for leadership involvement, which is presented in Chapter 5.
Table 1

**Summary of Leadership and Instructional Strategies' Themes**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Leadership Themes</th>
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<tr>
<td>1. Leadership Impacts the Classroom through Supervision of Framework</td>
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<td>1.1 Classrooms are influenced by leaders with persistent vision.</td>
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<tr>
<td>1.2 Leaders support through providing materials.</td>
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<td>2. Leadership Plays a Significant Role in Curriculum</td>
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<tr>
<td>2.1 Leaders support curriculum by providing time for discussion.</td>
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<tr>
<td>2.2 Leaders support curriculum through report card alignment.</td>
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<tr>
<td>3. Leadership Plays a Role in Professional Development</td>
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<tr>
<td>3.1 Classrooms are influenced by focused professional development.</td>
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<td>3.2 Modeling is an important aspect of professional development.</td>
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<td>3.3 Professional development that impacts classrooms is continuous and on-going.</td>
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<td>3.4 Sharing after professional development supports new strategies.</td>
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<td>4. Knowledgeable Leaders Impact Instructional Strategies</td>
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**Instructional Strategies' Themes**

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<tr>
<td>1. Framework Organizes the Instructional Strategies</td>
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<td>2. Instructional Strategies Have Roles in Writing Instruction</td>
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<td>2.1 Phonics instruction improved word analysis and leadership guidance was</td>
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<td>important for teachers.</td>
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<td>2.2 Guided reading teaches writing structures and comprehension.</td>
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<td>2.3 Self-selected reading teaches vocabulary and genre.</td>
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<td>2.4 Students are influenced by purposeful writing instruction modeled daily.</td>
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CHAPTER V: CONCLUSIONS

The results of this study are recapped in this chapter, followed by an examination of the four research questions presented in Chapter 1 and how they relate to these results. Limitations, recommendations for further research, and conclusions are also provided at the end of this chapter.

Overall, this research studied the practices of educators at an ethnically diverse, suburban elementary school with at-risk students which had undertaken specific leadership and instructional reforms, and had experienced an increase in their state writing scores. The overall research goal was to examine to what extent and how leadership-related practices impacted classroom instruction in a manner that may have helped produce successful writing scores, even for at-risk students. A case study approach was implemented to help explore four key leadership-related practices: supervision, curriculum, professional development, and knowledgeable leaders, and impact of these practices on classroom literacy-based instructional strategies.

The underlying theoretic base for this research is Reeves' (2004) model of student-centered accountability and the potential factors that may impact learning (which had built on the work of Marzano (2003), Fullan (2003) and others). According to Reeves’ theory, educators take charge of learning through not only the review of achievement scores, but also specific information on curriculum, teaching strategies, and leadership practices. The model includes a balance of quantitative and qualitative indicators. It relies on more than achievement scores alone, as it acknowledges the context for the learning. Within the context, leadership supervision is a strong component and the leaders are committed to a comprehensive curriculum.
In addition, professional development is necessary to provide educators the opportunity to learn effective strategies and leaders must be knowledgeable about curriculum, instruction, and assessment. Per Reeves, the more these essentials are identified and measured, the more learning takes place.

Another underlying theory revolves around classroom literacy-based instructional strategies that effectively impact writing skills. Such strategies are found within a balanced framework and organized into four areas: phonics, guided reading, self-selected reading, and writing (Cunningham & Hall, 1998). These strategies for instruction are organized in a coherent program that is implemented daily. Within this framework, students are taught their sound patterns with the phonics approach, and text structures and comprehension strategies during guided reading. Additionally, they are exposed to vocabulary and genre during self-selected reading of trade books and writing instruction which incorporates modeling, time for writing, conferencing, and sharing.

The school examined in this study had implemented each of the major leadership strategies as espoused by Reeves (2004), as well as a coherent balanced writing framework developed by Cunningham and Hall (1998). The major themes that emerged from this study are that educators perceive that both leadership-related practices and literacy-based instructional strategies played significant roles in the writing success of their students. Participants primarily identified these themes as including: (1) the influence of the leadership manifested through a persistent vision and materials needed to support that vision; (2) curriculum that was clarified through discussion and report card alignment; (3) the willingness of the leaders to provide
professional development that was focused, modeled, shared and continuous; (4) and leaders who were knowledgeable about the instructional methods they sought.

The second category that emerged concerned the impact instructional strategies had on the writing success of the school: (1) the strategies were organized around a coherent framework; and (2) each block in the framework, namely, phonics, guided reading, self-selecting reading, and writing was cited as playing a significant role. The study demonstrated that classroom teachers are aware that development is occurring through time spent on each block as they identified the role of each block in developing writing skills.

The study found that the leadership-related practices impact the instructional strategies in the following ways: the coherent framework is supported through the leaders' supervision; its foundation is a comprehensive curriculum; and the leaders, as well as teachers, become knowledgeable of the framework through professional development.

A comparison of these results to Reeves' theory demonstrates an overlap between the findings of this study and his model. Reeves' inclusion of leadership practices, curriculum, and teaching strategies as all-important factors for a successful school is evident in the participants' identification of effective practices and strategies. While individual participants did not specifically describe their experience in terms of the components identified by Reeves (i.e. student-centered accountability, antecedents of excellence, holistic accountability), these elements are present in the findings of this study. They are apparent in areas such as leadership supervision of
instructional strategies which were based on a curriculum and supported with professional development.

Participants credit both the leadership-related practices and teaching strategies for their students' writing success. These effective teaching strategies involve a coherent literacy instructional program which is evident in the participants' identification of effective classroom practice. The applicability of the findings of this research with Reeves' model and a model of literacy instruction is evident in a comprehensive review of the study's research questions, as detailed in the following sections.

**Review of Research Questions**

**Research Question 1**

The first set of research questions focuses on *to what extent* and *how* leadership-related practices consisting of systemic supervision, a comprehensive curriculum, supported professional development, and knowledgeable leaders influenced students' successful writing scores, (including the at-risk student sub-populations).

In order to address these questions, the concepts of "leadership-related practices" and "successful writing scores" and "at risk" must be further explained. Reeves asserted that educators must examine their buildings' leadership practices and study the connections of those practices to student achievement. The greater the accountability to these practices, the more likely the students were to succeed on assessments (Reeves, 2004). Since the context of this study dealt with writing, it is appropriate to view the leadership impact on classroom instruction in terms of success.
on writing assessments. Successful writing scores for this study are defined as MEAP (Michigan Educational Assessment Program) proficiency scores that are higher than the state average. The context of this study also includes students who are at risk, which is defined as those students with limited family income. For the purpose of this study, the leadership-related practices, the classroom instructional strategies, and the ability to be a successful writer on state assessments regardless of family income appear to be a suitable lens to gauge to what extent and how leadership-influenced practices successfully impact classroom writing instruction.

Of the sixteen individuals who participated in this study, twelve responded that the school was in need of a change in instructional strategies if their students were going to succeed. The remaining four participants had been hired after such a change was implemented. Each participant had to decide if he or she was willing to overcome whatever obstacles existed in order to make those changes. The reasons participants gave for changing their literacy-based instructional practices revolved around the impact of the leadership-related practices they experienced: supervision, curriculum, professional development, and knowledge of their leaders.

The influence of the supervision offered by their leaders is a consistent theme in the development of their successful students in the area of writing and reading. Twelve of the sixteen participants indicated that supervision was an important impetus in their change in instructional practice. The utilization of Four Blocks instructional strategies is an initial demonstration of this impact. Participants described how leaders impacted this process through frequent classroom visits and meaningful dialogue. Indeed, nine of the sixteen participants made changes in their
instruction due to the persistent message from leaders as to what effective classroom instruction looked like; and eleven of the sixteen individuals made changes due to the materials provided to them for the implementation of these strategies.

The impact of leadership practices is further demonstrated by the participants' understanding of the curriculum they are required to teach. Mastery of curriculum can impact students’ educational and career options and be viewed as an indication of how well the students were taught it. All of the sixteen participants indicated they understood the curriculum as being the Grade Level Content Expectations (GLCEs). Eleven individuals identified that discussions about the GLCEs with their colleagues were a significant factor in helping them understand and use the curriculum. Seven of the sixteen participants indicated that the alignment of GLCEs with the district report card supported their use of the curriculum standards. Consequently, some individuals changed their instructional practices due to the influence of these discussions about the curriculum, while others switched after aligning the grade level expectations with the district report card.

Attending professional development meetings and subsequently persisting in the use of the strategies that were taught therein demonstrates that participants in this study changed their instructional practices due to professional development. While it is evident that professional development played a significant role in this process, further clarification concerning the content of professional development must be given before a response to the last portion of the research question can be offered. To that end, definitions of the strategies taught within professional development will be examined in subsequent research questions before determining if the relationship
between professional development and writing success can be considered to be evidence of impacted classroom instruction.

The impact of leadership-related practices is further demonstrated by the value placed on knowledgeable leaders. Fifteen of the sixteen participants agreed that their leaders were knowledgeable regarding the instructional practices the leaders wanted implemented and that this was important. Leaders actively sought out information, had extensive knowledge, and subsequently were a resource for the participants who asked questions and received answers regarding the changes they were making in instructional strategies.

A change in instructional strategies used by the educators came as a result of their leaders' supervision, clarity in curriculum, professional development, and leaders' knowledge regarding instruction. While it is evident that such leadership-related practices played a role in this process, further clarification concerning how the leadership-related practices influenced students, including those at risk, must be given before a response to the last portion of the research question can be offered. There are several discussions of how leadership-related practices constitute an important school improvement strategy for all students, including the at risk, which are applicable to the findings of this study.

Regarding supervision, Marzano (2003) found that effective leaders identified a strategic intervention and inspired staff with strong guidance and consideration. In addition, Reeves (2004) revealed that leaders must coach through discussions and action items related to student achievement. According to Saha and Biddle (2006), the enthusiasm of supervisors was found to be key to the supervision of new strategies.
Correspondingly, the impact of the leaders' guidance, consideration and enthusiasm is acknowledged by several participants in this study. Kathy credits the leaders as having the idea for the strategies and then guiding her, starting small and getting larger and larger. Coaching was recognized by John who reported that the leaders always gave him support whenever needed; and if he ever had any questions, he would go right to the leaders immediately.

Similarly, Carla shared how the leaders rearranged her schedules, as well as her schemas, all while steering the boat. Likewise, according to Kate, the leaders researched, put together a plan, and stated "we are going to do this," yet at the same time the leaders said to take a breath until staff felt comfortable with the plan and then went with it until they were onboard.

Concerning a comprehensive curriculum, Marzano (2003) and Reeves (2004) found that curriculum impacts student achievement if the school documents the relationship of the curriculum to implementation in the classroom. Furthermore, Guskey (2003) asserts that if teachers were supported in their use of the curriculum, they found time to translate research based strategies into sound instruction and even modify it for diverse student populations.

Likewise, the importance of the curriculum was well known by the study participants. The influence of the curriculum was reported by Liz, who learned from the leaders that the GLCEs were the grade level expectations for all her students and how it was her job to teach them, even when she felt overwhelmed. Therefore, she found that the discussions with her colleagues about the GLCEs helped her to focus on the essence of the standards with her students.
Mary also heard a number of presentations about how important the GLCEs were to her school’s success. She reported that leaders were always available to talk with her about how to align them with the district report card and where she needed her students to be in terms of mastery. In addition, the GLCEs were readily available on her computer. With one click the GLCEs and the report cards were accessible. Both Karla and Gayle agreed the aligned report cards clarified and delineated the curriculum to them, as well as to parents, so all knew which benchmarks were being addressed.

On the subject of professional development, the findings of Marzano (2003) and Reeves (2006) confirmed that expert teachers had more strategies from professional development at their disposal than ineffective teachers. Table A4 in Appendix H contains a comparison of Marzano’s work with the findings of this research. Reeves also claimed that teachers benefit from an organization process to support putting such strategies into use in their classrooms. In addition, Blasé and Blasé (1998) stated that teachers needed to be involved in the planning of professional development. Furthermore, Fullan (2003) went on to say that change occurs during professional development as teachers talk together, problem-solve, and consequently experience a shift in their educational philosophy.

There are several examples from this study demonstrating the role of professional development and the impact it had on the participants. The leaders in our study modeled the repetition of strategies until participants understood them and knew why the strategies would be effective. Additionally, the leaders used checklists on a regular basis to make sure each block of instruction was complete. Grace said
that after the leaders observed her using the strategies, she could subsequently adjust them because they would tell her what she did well and how to improve.

In the same way, the continuous professional development helped Chris understand the strategies so she could go “all out” and use them fully and effectively. Five participants said book club conversations helped develop their literacy-based instructional practices. Kate added that those meetings with the book club every other week helped her refine her instruction a little bit at a time. Amy indicated how conversations with colleagues guided her instruction because she had clearer direction for what she should do with all her knowledge.

Concerning leaders’ knowledge of curriculum, instruction, and assessment, Reeves (2006) explained how the knowledge of leaders impacted classroom instruction when he posited that leaders are expected to set the direction for the use of effective teaching strategies. Furthermore, Barabasi (2003) found that successful leaders cultivated commitment to change models through their modeling.

Correspondingly, the leaders in the study indicated their commitment to the curriculum, instruction and assessment requirements through their research, time spent on professional development, and the use of the school’s financial resources. Dana stated the principal and literacy specialist had extensive knowledge of the strategies the school used; and that even though they did not have to, they went out and learned as much as they could so they could help the teachers in any way.

In addition, the literacy specialist made sure the school implemented the strategies in a pure form and that the school implemented them totally. Chris
supported the significance of the leaders' knowledge when she said that she learned
the most from the dialogues and materials she had received from the leaders.

Research Question 2

The second set of research question focused on whether there were barriers to
the implementation of the leadership-influenced practices and what strategies were
utilized for overcoming such barriers (see Table A2 in Appendix F for a summary for
these barriers as broken down by participant).

Regarding the barriers for systematic supervision, of the study participants,
nine of the sixteen expected the supervisors to alter the supervision for instructional
changes each year. As a result, in the beginning these study participants indicated that
they did not invest in learning the new strategies. The leaders overcame this barrier in
two ways. They gave a persistent message that the new literacy-based instructional
strategies would be utilized for five years and subsequently reiterated that message
continually. Several examples were cited by the study participants demonstrating they
knew the direction the leaders were headed due to the constant reminders about
implementing the new strategies they were taught to use in professional development.
The leaders expected to observe the strategies being used and visited the classrooms
often to support and encourage the teachers in the implementation.

In addition, a lack of materials for implementing new strategies was identified
as a barrier. This barrier was overcome through the provision of numerous supportive
materials. Ten of the sixteen study participants cited the support they received
through the purchases of books and materials as very useful to them in their
implementation of the new strategies. Additionally, the money spent on these
materials signaled to the participants that the strategies were important, valued and here to stay. These purchases overcame the barriers of doubt and uncertainty about the longevity of the innovative practices, as well as any frustration due to a lack of materials needed for incorporating the strategies into their lesson plans.

The persistent supervision and the purchase of supportive materials overcame barriers to the utilization of the new literacy-based instruction. Both behaviors were documented on meeting agendas and purchase orders.

While none of these participants characterized the persistent supervision or the materials as applying to the at-risk subpopulation, it appears that at-risk students were influenced over time by the persistence of supervision regarding effective strategies, as well as the new materials. Kathy stated that the school was a prime example of low income kids that can succeed because there were no excuses accepted by the leadership as to why the at-risk students could not achieve. Instead, every teacher was expected to implement the comprehensive program to meet the needs of all learners. The materials which benefited all learners were important to Carla who said it was simply too much to have to make all of the materials in addition to learning the new strategies. This is consistent with the research regarding effective instruction for those at risk cited by the National Institute of Child Health and Human Development (2000). It needs to be done repeatedly by each of the staff and materials have to be available at the students’ instructional level.

Concerning barriers for a comprehensive curriculum, fourteen of the sixteen study participants indicated the curriculum expectations were difficult to understand and this challenge was a barrier to their use of the curriculum as expressed in the
GLCEs. Such a barrier was overcome through discussion and alignment with the district report card. Through such discussion and alignment, the relationship between curriculum and classroom could be seen.

In this case study, the GLCEs were distributed to the study participants. Of the sixteen participants, eleven noted that ensuing discussions with colleagues about the GLCEs revealed their importance and value. The discussions allowed them to be consistent in their interpretations and to discuss which instructional strategies could be used to help the students gain mastery. In addition, seven study participants reported that the report cards were aligned with the GLCEs. This ensured that GLCEs would be taught, assessed and reported to parents. These two behaviors overcame the barrier of the curriculum being misunderstood or overlooked. The teachers understand the grade level expectations of their students by the state.

Although none of these participants described the discussions and alignment as influencing at-risk students, it is fair to say the discussions and aligned report cards were significant for at-risk students. The teachers said they now understood the skills their students needed to master and knew they were expected to teach those skills due to the report cards. At Kate stated, she tried not to go off task because she needed to stick to the GLCEs. Since the aligned report card was the accountability document, Liz knew how her students were doing on meeting the expectations of the state for her grade level. This enabled her to know who needed additional teaching and is consistent with the research regarding effective instruction for those at risk cited by Adams (1990). They need more significant literacy-related experiences which is
accomplished through closely adhering to the standards and benchmarks in the state curriculum.

Concerning barriers for professional development, according to eight of the study participants, one barrier to meaningful professional development is the different learning styles in the audiences hearing the information. They realized that some educators understood the strategies quickly, others needed more explanation, a number needed modeling, others the big picture, and several only wanted the details. This barrier was overcome by providing a variety of professional development offerings that were continuous, focused, modeled, and shared to try to meet the needs and learning styles of all educators. All the strategies were hard for Mary at first, but due to continuous professional development each year she learned at a deeper level and saw more and more results. Carla indicated she would never have understood how to teach writing if she had not seen it modeled.

The number of professional development opportunities was significant as documented in the school’s improvement plans. Professional development helped all study participants know how to implement new instructional strategies. Ten teachers commented that while they had some opportunity to share how to incorporate what they learned in professional development, they desired even more time, which is yet another indication of the importance of professional development to participants.

While the participants did not mention specifically the benefit that professional development provided the at-risk student, it is fair to say that the mastery of the new strategies benefited all learners, since writing strategies were taught thoroughly due to the extensive training received by the study participants. This is
consistent with the research cited by Schmoker (2006) who found that at-risk students often struggle with writing because writing criteria never get taught but are assigned with unclear instructions. In this school, these strategies were systematically put into place for all students.

On the topic of barriers for knowledgeable leaders, the barrier cited here by study participants was that typically leaders were too busy with other priorities to learn about effective instructional techniques. According to Reeves, leadership practices in this area are identified by the way the leaders used their discretionary time and the manner in which they discuss effective instruction. Such behaviors indicate a willingness to be accountable for learning.

Fifteen participants viewed their leaders as knowledgeable about the instructional strategies they expected from their teachers. Participants were aware that their leaders had invested much of their time and energy attending all types of professional development to learn about the instructional strategies which were part of the literacy framework and were able to answer all their questions about the practices.

As a result of this knowledge, the leaders stated clearly and confidently that the strategies would be effective for all learners, including those at risk. Due to their knowledge the leaders persevered. In addition, they purchased necessary materials for those below grade level and paid close attention to the curriculum which defined which standards needed to be mastered at each grade level. Furthermore, they knew what professional development would be helpful to assist at-risk learners to achieve at grade level. This is consistent with the research cited by Kameenui and Carnine.
(1998) who cited successful schools impacting the at-risk students spend more time on writing.

The leadership-related practices revolved around supervision for the use of a literacy framework of instructional strategies. In addition, leaders helped to define the state curriculum and showed how the instructional strategies effectively taught the state grade level expectations. Moreover, a variety of continuous, focused professional development offerings that explained and modeled the strategies was provided by the school’s leaders. Furthermore, the leaders became knowledgeable about the strategies they desired the teacher to implement. Table 2 summarizes these key leadership barriers identified in this study and how they were addressed.
Table 2

Summary of Leadership Barriers Experienced and Addressed

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Leadership</th>
<th>Prior Barriers Experienced</th>
<th>How Barriers Overcome</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Supervision</td>
<td>Inconsistent</td>
<td>Persistent monitoring of specific strategies</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Materials and training not provided</td>
<td>Necessary materials and training provided</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Leadership Impact on Curriculum</td>
<td>Lack of understanding of the curriculum</td>
<td>Discussion of curriculum took place at meetings</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Lack of understanding of the alignment of curriculum with instruction and assessment</td>
<td>Alignment of curriculum with instruction and assessment was completed</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Leadership Impact on Professional Development</td>
<td>Not focused</td>
<td>Focused on <em>Four Blocks</em> strategies</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Not modeled</td>
<td>Strategies were modeled</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Not continuous</td>
<td>Professional Development was offered often</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Not shared</td>
<td>Learning at Professional Development was shared</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Leadership Impact on Instructional Strategies</td>
<td>Leaders not knowledgeable about the strategies they sought</td>
<td>Leaders very knowledgeable about the strategies they sought</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Research Question 3*

The third set of research questions focuses on *to what extent* and *how* literacy-based instructional practices influence students' successful writing scores in a school that had experienced an increase in their writing scores, even for at risk students.

Four literacy strategies have been cited by experts in the field of literacy to be among the most widely accepted strategies (Mazzoni & Gambrell, 2003). In addition,
research indicates that no single approach is best for all learners and combination approaches work better than any single method (Pearson & Raphael, 2003). The foundation for a comprehensive literacy curriculum involves all four literacy approaches. In this study, such a framework using each of the four approaches is referred to as Four Blocks (Cunningham & Hall, 1998), and was implemented within this school.

In order to address these questions, the four literacy approaches of phonics, guided reading, self-selected reading and writing must be explained. The phonic approach involves the letter-sound systems, guided reading consists of teaching comprehension strategies as well as text structures, self-selected reading allows children to learn about genre and vocabulary as they choose their own text to read, and writing instruction includes modeling the writing skills, conferencing and sharing student writing.

Regarding the extent to which literacy-based instruction influenced writing, the first principle for the literacy framework is the importance of making a schedule that includes each of the four components and adhering to it. Thirty to forty minutes each day is given to each block of instruction. A schedule including the Four Blocks was organized by the leaders for all teachers so that they could fit the Four Blocks in every day without interruption. Ten of the sixteen study participants said this scheduling benefited them as well as their students. The message from the leaders was that each block was to be done every day. Stacey and Amy both indicated the schedule provided by the leaders gave them the structure for the day so they could teach each of the blocks and enabled them to teach all the strategies.
The second principle for this coherent instructional program revolves around the organization of strategies within each of the blocks. Each thirty minute segment consists of a variety of multi-leveled strategies. This enables the teachers to connect strategies as well as address the needs of the multiple learning styles of students who were below, at, or above grade level. As the literacy specialist stated, it was important that students receive purposeful instruction each day. The principal made certain that professional development included the proficient use of all of the strategies and Connie confirmed that she indeed received all the support she needed to learn every part of the strategies.

As to how literacy-based instruction influenced writing, of the sixteen participants, nine stated that the phonics block helped their students with spelling and sound patterns as they learned how to explicitly decode and encode words. In addition, the word wall portion helped their students with spelling, as well as word structure. Grace said her students would use their letters and sounds and when writing words get so close to it [correct spelling] with beginning and ending sounds. Gayle told of her students looking at the word wall to make sure they were spelling correctly and the word wall helping them by providing common word patterns.

Eight of the sixteen participants concluded that their use of the strategies in the guided reading block gave their students opportunity to understand text structures and be exposed to quality writing. Mary said her students looked back at their literature to see examples of good writing and this block gave them springboards for writing about genre, like biographies. Liz observed that her students’ writing of a
particular genre was more fully developed since they had studied that genre in their reading practice as well.

Of the sixteen participants, eight indicated that the self selected block gave their students the opportunity to understand the different genres and how to read them, using the author's purpose to guide them. This block exposed students to a wide range of rich vocabulary in text that held meaning since it was self selected. Carla used sticky notes during this time to help her students focus on vocabulary and she found that students loved to find writing elements like dialogue and share them with her. Amy also affirmed that her students were constantly finding vocabulary and pulling them into their writing.

Ten participants stated that the writing block in which they modeled writing skills, conferencing with students about those skills as they wrote, and having students share their writing were instrumental in helping students learn to successfully write. Dana indicated that modeling during the mini-lesson was critical as it made her focus on a purpose and improved her students writing skills. The literacy specialist observed teachers modeling for their students purposeful instruction with depth due to their significant training and understanding of genre, authors, reading, and writing connection.

Research Question 4

The fourth set of research questions focused on whether there were barriers to the implementation of the instructional practices and what strategies were utilized for overcoming such barriers.
Regarding barriers for the literacy-based instructional framework, ten of the sixteen study participants indicated they felt overwhelmed about how to implement the four different types of multi-level, multi-method blocks and this was a key barrier for them. This barrier was overcome by each of the four leadership-influenced practices. Persistent supervision helped teachers gain confidence that these strategies were worth learning well, and the materials that the leaders provided made each strategy doable. Additionally, the curriculum which was discussed and aligned with *Four Blocks*, as well as the report card, streamlined teachers’ efforts. Furthermore, the modeling done during professional development gave study participants the certainty about their ability to use the *Four Blocks* strategies. Also, the leaders’ knowledge about the instructional framework gave assurance to all study participants that the implementation of these new strategies would be successful in helping all of their learners.

In addition, study participants cited the challenge of fitting all the blocks into their schedules. This barrier of fitting *Four Blocks* into the school day was met by leaders who organized schedules for all teachers so that they could fit all *Four Blocks* into their class schedule, everyday, without interruption, and with support if available. The implementation was school wide and included special education teachers.

Barriers were overcome regarding the cognitive, emotional, social and instructional factors for at-risk students cited by Lipson and Wixson (1997). Cognitively, at-risk students benefited from the coherence of the instructional program and the increased time spent actually writing and reading (Broaddus & Bloodgood, 1994). All staff was prepared to teach the same strategies and they had
time for dialogue about the strategies. As Liz stated, strategies were valued because everyone was supposed to be using the same program compared to her earlier experience when a few of the teachers used similar strategies.

Emotionally, at-risk students benefited because they were not pulled from regular education classrooms for special services. Instead they remained in multi-leveled classrooms and received *Four Blocks* instruction that was consistent across the grade levels and at their level. As Allington (1991) indicated, at-risk students are delicate learners and are most in need of consistent instruction.

Socially, at-risk students benefited as each block contained strategies that were designed to be motivational due to the successes the students would have. The strategies that the teachers utilized in each block addressed the instructional levels of all students. Since the principal had high expectations for students and teachers, this motivated teachers to expect their at-risk students to achieve and as Mary pointed out there was no reason they could not achieve.

Instructionally, students were more successful due to the cohesiveness of the framework. As the leaders noted, due to the discussions about the curriculum, the instruction and assessments of all students proceeded systematically from one grade level to the next and offered a progression of increasingly complex subject matter rather than repeating basic material previously taught. The aligned report card was used to share this progress with parents, which is another important impetus according to Marzano (2003).

Concerning barriers to individual blocks, the study revealed that eight participants thought the barriers to a strong phonics block were materials and a
structure for the strategies. Both barriers were overcome. Materials such as word walls, letters, pocket charts, and dictionaries all were provided by the leaders. The structure was discussed at professional development and fit within the time frame. This structure provided strategies and time for the word wall words, penmanship, and word study.

Cunningham and Hall's second principle for each block was that it included multi-level instruction made possible through mixed-ability grouping. Specifically, in the phonics block, at-risk students were supported through manipulatives, kinesthetic, oral, auditory, and visual strategies. Patterns were discovered and transfer was clear between known and unknown words. Grace stated that after the initial organizing of materials she was all set and Gayle stopped skipping the block once she realized how to do it and how important it was.

The barriers to the guided reading block for nine of the sixteen study participants were materials and an understanding of how to structure it. Texts were needed for all different levels of ability and study of text structures. Modeling of the structure was provided by extensive professional development and books were purchased by leaders. Cunningham and Hall made this available to all levels of reading ability through the use of different levels of text difficulty and various strategies for reading, including partner, small group, or choral. These also included different genre. In addition, comprehension strategies were taught that helped students understand written text. Opportunities were given to at-risk students to work with the teacher in a small group that was multi-level so the student did not know he or she was chosen for the extra support. After teaching the comprehension strategies
and the text strategies, Carla had her students offer that they saw the connections
between the stories and what they were asked to write in the writing block. Mary,
never before had a structure to how to teach comprehension strategies.

Regarding the self-selected block, the barriers for twelve of the study
participants were the number of books that were needed for their classrooms and a
purpose for conferencing about the reading. A vast number of books was necessary so
students would have many choices for level, genre, and interest. This barrier was
overcome by book purchases which included many different types of genre. At risk
students benefited from reading self-selected texts at levels which impacted their
vocabulary exposure. Cunningham and Hall varied this approach by providing
different genre and reading levels for students. Motivation was provided for all
students through opportunities to conference with their teachers about the books and
share favorite authors with their peers. Amy found that she structured her time well
using the structure of the read-aloud, conferencing, and sharing and that the block
could be implemented fully only because she had the books in her classroom.

The writing block barrier for eleven of the sixteen study participants revolved
around a lack of understanding as to how to teach writing. This barrier was
surmounted by modeling provided through professional development, as well as
knowledgeable leaders. At-risk students benefited from writing instruction because it
was modeled clearly and with purpose. In addition, all students benefited from
conferencing individually with their teachers about their writing. This block
addressed the needs of all learners through individual conferencing with the teacher.
Students shared their writing with their teacher and peers; this kept them motivated
and focused according to Connie. Furthermore, Dana indicated that previously she had not felt confident as a writer or a writing teacher, but because she was forced to model this made her a better writer and writing teacher. Table 3 summarizes these key literacy barriers identified in this study and how these were addressed by various leadership practices.

Table 3

*Summary of Literacy Barriers Experienced and Addressed*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Literacy Blocks</th>
<th>Prior Barriers Experienced</th>
<th>How Barriers Overcome</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Framework</td>
<td>Time for four blocks</td>
<td>Leaders protected two hours</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Phonics</td>
<td>Materials needed</td>
<td>Word wall words, pocket charts, letters, dictionaries purchased</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Lack of understanding of how to make phonics instruction meaningful</td>
<td><em>Four Blocks</em> structure provided multi-level, hands-on activities for teaching phonics</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Guided Reading</td>
<td>Books at different levels needed</td>
<td>Leveled books purchased</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Lack of understanding of how to teach comprehension</td>
<td><em>Four Blocks</em> provided format for teaching thinking strategies</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Self-Selected Reading</td>
<td>Books of different genre needed</td>
<td>Books purchased</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Lack of purpose for conferencing</td>
<td><em>Four Blocks</em> structure provided purpose for conferencing</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Writing</td>
<td>Understanding of how to teach writing needed</td>
<td>Modeling of <em>Four Blocks</em> format provided understanding of how to teach writing</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Overall, these qualitative research findings clearly illustrate that within this particular school, the implementation of key leadership-based practices (as
recommended by Reeves, Marzano, and others), in conjunction with a comprehensive coherent writing curriculum (as recommended by Calkins, Cunningham and Hall and others) were indeed perceived to have a direct influence on classroom instructional practices, which in turn was felt to have impacted the learning of students (as measured in part by state test scores). Many instructional barriers were experienced, but all were overcome to some extent, thanks in large part to the leadership behaviors. The results from this study support the theory and models of others, and illustrate how those ideas were actually implemented in some school with significant success.

Suggestions for Further Research

There are several suggestions for further research that can be generated from the results of this study. A similar project could seek to identify the writing strategies used with at-risk students in kindergarten and follow their writing progress through grade five. It would allow for deeper reflection about these strategies since there would be a greater length of time for study participants to reflect on the strategies that would help the students. Attempts were made in this qualitative research to add depth to the interviews by providing questions in advance to participants and allowing for member checking, but the data could be improved through interviews that could continue throughout the years as teachers became more confident with their use of the strategies.

In addition, further research on successful schools could focus on each leadership practice in isolation along with the implemented writing strategies. A consistent theme in this study was the impact of four leadership practices in combination on participants’ instructional strategies. A significant amount of research
has been done on each leadership practice (Ackerman & Mackenzie, 2006; Fullan, 2003; Marzano, 2003; Ornstein, Behar-Horenstein, & Pajak, 2003). However, little attention has been given to the independent impact of each as it relates to the instructional strategies. Further research could concentrate on the impact of each leadership practice on each of the particular classroom strategies.

A third area for future research could focus on each individual instructional block of strategies in isolation coupled with the leadership practices and the subsequent impact on students’ writing. Previously each block of instructional strategies has been studied (Adams, 1990; Allington & Cunningham, 1996; Tierney & Shanahan, 1991; Veatch, 1959) and deemed unable to impact all learners. However, the leadership practices have never been acknowledged or examined and the question remains if lack of leadership was the missing link.

In addition, this study could be repeated in three years with the same group of educators to determine if they were still being supervised with the same leadership practices, and if they maintained the instructional strategies and gains over time. This process could bring further clarity to the themes that emerged from this study or provide additional insights on the experiences of the participants.

Finally, an additional study could be done to examine the instructional practices of teachers whose students were not successful. Further research could be conducted on those individuals whose students did not achieve mastery to determine whether or not their teachers were using the Four Blocks instructional strategies proficiently and why or why not.
Overall Conclusions

The purpose of this study was to examine the applicability of Reeves' (2004) theory of student-centered accountability, and Cunningham and Hall's (1998) instructional framework, on the classrooms of an elementary school which was successful in the area of writing. This qualitative research adds to the literature on successful writing instruction by placing the study within a school where leadership-related practices were combined with an instructional framework. Fullan (2003) called for research to help leaders build high-performing schools in an age of accountability when schools systems are moving away from obsolete 20th century models of leadership. Furthermore, this study provides data on the implementation of particular writing strategies that impact students' writing scores. This addresses an additional shortcoming in the literature presented by King and Newmann (2000) by examining the implementation plans of effective strategies.

This research allowed for in-depth learning about the applicability of leadership-related practices to a school where the leadership behaviors were very transparent, and the participants indicated they were impacted by particular leadership practices. It was interesting to note that some participants indicated they aligned with the leaders because they knew that the institution had low literacy scores, thus they needed to change course. This finding points to the possibility that participants may have been especially receptive to new leadership-related practices and classroom strategies due to their previous experiences with leadership and strategies, as well as the low achievement of the students. The responses indicated that these educators went through a process of accountability for learning which demonstrates that
Reeves' model of student-centered accountability is indeed applicable to this type of educational environment. Table A3 in Appendix G contains a comparison of Reeves' work with the findings of this research. This table shows that in addition to leadership strategies in place, educators need to utilize effective instructional practices.

The finding of this study demonstrating the applicability of Reeves' theory of student-centered accountability within the context of an elementary school answers critiques of Reeves offered by state policy makers who report scores only (Cherry, 2006). This research, however, found Reeves' emphasis on the examination of the context for the scores was an appropriate lens for examining student learning within the environment of an elementary school. This study started with successful MEAP scores and then worked backwards to examine how these were obtained.

This study also extends previous studies done on the utilization of a literacy framework within an elementary school. Cunningham and Hall’s work examining the impact of a literacy framework within the context of an elementary school was similar to this research in regards to background student variables, a literacy instructional framework, and the decision to focus on a single institution. Similar to Cunningham and Hall, this research also found evidence of the impact of specific instructional strategies on writing. This research also examined leadership-influenced practices and found that such practices impacted teachers in four main areas: supervision of the framework, supporting curriculum, professional development on the framework, and knowledgeable leaders. The findings of this research, therefore, extend and unite Cunningham and Hall’s and Reeves’ work. Table A5 in Appendix I
contains a comparison of Cunningham and Hall’s work with the findings of this research.

In addition to furthering what is known from such earlier studies (e.g. Reeves, Cunningham & Hall), this research furthers what is known about the impact of a framework of instructional strategies on at-risk students. The participants’ reports concerning the impact of various instructional strategies are not surprising given the amount of research present on them (Pearson & Raphael, 2003). However, the impact of a coherent program is noteworthy since participants reported that the framework was as significant a factor in achieving improved writing scores as the leadership-related practices. While there are studies dealing with instruction befitting the at risk, a significant portion of literature focuses on the importance of strategies and ways to increase their effectiveness without noting the impact of the leadership-related practices (Snow, Burns, & Griffin, 1998). The results of this study suggest that leadership practices be given more attention in the research since participants referenced this category with the same degree of frequency as they did instructional strategies.

Additionally, as previously mentioned, the literature on at-risk students and instruction heavily focuses on providing additional resources for at-risk students (Blythe, Allen, & Powell, 1999). Study participants did not mention additional strategies or resources as necessary for at-risk or special education students (beyond the additional materials provided for all students). Several participants mentioned the value of collegiality, with the whole school working together. Several also mentioned the satisfaction of receiving professional development that sharpened their skills,
enabling them to help all learners be successful. In addition, they asserted that they benefited from leaders who supervised and purchased materials for all types of learners and had knowledge of strategies that benefited at-risk students. Furthermore, they stated that an aligned curriculum supported their efforts with at-risk students.

Furthermore, this research revealed that particular writing strategies found within the instructional framework had a significant impact on writing skills. In doing so, this study supports Calkins’ (1994) work. This research also furthers what is known about the impact of leadership-related practices on writing strategies, whereby participants reported that leaders were as significant a factor as the strategies. The results of this study suggest writing strategies benefit from leaders to supervise them, curriculum that supports them, professional development about them and leaders who are knowledgeable of them. Participants in this study also commented on the implementation of these writing strategies every day for at least thirty to forty minutes, therefore the finding of this research extends Calkins’ earlier work. Table A 6 in Appendix J contains a comparison of Calkins’ work with the findings of this research.

It is also interesting to note what is not present in the findings of this study. This research furthers what is known about the impact of an instructional framework in regards to the structure and strategies within. A significant investigation of the Four Blocks framework within the context of the elementary school was offered by Hibbert and Iannacci (2005). Their work focused on time factors and defined strategies as restrictive to the creativity of the teacher. This study contradicts Hibbert and Iannacci findings concerning the framework in two main areas: time blocks
scheduled by the leaders were valuable to the teachers, and the strategies within the blocks provided them a formatting structure they desired. This study, therefore, adds structure and tools to the list of influences in terms of the impact a framework has on writing scores. In doing so, this study challenges Hibbert and Iannacci’s work and raises questions regarding the role of a cohesive framework within the applicability of Reeves’ work.

Implications for Practice at Elementary Schools with At Risk

The individual experiences of participants demonstrate that the components of Reeves’ model were present within the experiences of educators at the school in this study. Leadership-related practices were found to interact with the school’s instructional practices, which impacted the writing scores for students. While confirming Reeves’ model, these findings also provide insight into instructional practices in regards to writing instruction. In addition to emphasizing the impact instructional strategies have on the writing success of students, including at risk, this study also demonstrates that a significant amount of leadership impact was felt from experiences teachers had outside the classroom (e.g., professional development, alignment discussions). These findings should cause institutions to think about innovative ways to get leaders intentionally committed to a plan to supervise a coherent literacy framework, clarify the curriculum, provide professional development, and obtain knowledge about instructional strategies within the balanced framework they seek.

Additionally, the role of “traditional” classroom strategies such as phonics, guided reading, self-selected reading, and writing should also be examined in light of
the findings of this study. Few study participants mentioned being impacted by each of these strategies despite the fact that they historically have all been viewed as the key components of literacy instruction that would impact all students. As a result, schools may need to look for innovative ways to get educators to study cohesive frameworks of instructional practices. One way to increase instructional program coherence would be in college classes or through professional development. A possible way to increase supervision for effective strategies would be to train principals on effective strategies within a literacy framework. This would give these leaders contact with cohesive frameworks that would best impact all their students, including the at risk.

Finally, the strong theme regarding leadership and instruction influences on at-risk students could be used to rethink how specific leadership-related strategies and instructional practices influence classrooms with at-risk students. This study demonstrates the difference leadership-related practices and instructional strategies can have on such students. Decisions surrounding the supervision of a framework, curriculum work, professional development and leaders' knowledge level about curriculum, instruction, and assessments could be reviewed to determine how at-risk students are best taught. The at-risk students could benefit from confident leaders and teachers who were able to use a variety of instructional strategies with expertise. Students who are at risk could gain from available materials on their level and from a variety of materials and instructional strategies that appeal to all learning styles.

A final recommendation for improving the writing scores of all students at elementary schools would be to look for ways to be more intentional with the purpose
of professional development and the follow-up that is needed. Professional development could be chosen and designed to build the skill level with educators and selected for the effectiveness of the strategies. Leaders could be trained to follow-up on the professional development, as well as writing assessments. Funding for assistant superintendents of curriculum, principals and literacy specialists already exists so there would be minimal additional costs to the institution, and involvement with professional development could be made a condition of the contract. Such an arrangement would provide a context for a district strategic plan that would impact classrooms in areas such as supervision, curriculum, professional development and knowledge about cohesive instructional programs. This would help eliminate the knowing-doing gap (Pfeffer & Sutton, 2000, 2006), by enabling schools to turn knowledge into action.

The relevance of Reeves’ theory and Cunningham and Hall’s literacy framework within the study’s environment, the existence of themes dealing with leadership-related practices and instructional strategies, and the applicability of the findings to a discussion of institutional practice was generated from the experiences of sixteen similar yet distinctive individuals. While all of these participants had different backgrounds, the study participants experienced the impact of the leadership-related practices and instructional strategies in similar ways. They found the leadership-related practices to have impacted their classroom instruction benefited all their students in the area of writing, not only those in poverty. In addition, they were supported by a literacy framework that was supervised by knowledgeable leaders, based on a coherent curriculum, and supported by professional development.
As a result, they believed their students developed into successful writers – a goal desired by all educators and as evidenced by fourth grade state test scores going from 59.6% passing writing in 2004, to 91.6% passing in 2005. Overall, this study revealed that theory really can be implemented into successful practice.
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Appendix A

Requesting Participation Letter
Requesting Participation Letter

Dear Teacher,

My name is Barb Johnson and I am the principal of Brown Elementary School in Byron Center, Michigan. In addition to my administrative duties, I am also a doctoral student at Western Michigan University. I am writing to ask you to be part of a qualitative research study on leadership-influenced practices that impact classroom instruction related to writing. This is part of the requirements for a doctoral degree in Educational Leadership. I hope you will agree to participate.

Participating in this study will include:

An interview conversation that should last approximately 60-90 minutes and that will be conducted after school hours in a private location in your school building. Prior to this conversation, I will submit the interview questions to you and request your responses in advance that I might review them. This conversation will be recorded by a tape recorder, and I will also be taking written notes. If needed, a follow up meeting may occur which will allow me to check for accuracy of my notes and to ask any follow up questions I had after reviewing the transcripts of our first meeting.

Participation in this study is completely voluntary and there is no penalty for not participating or for withdrawing from the study. If you agree to participate in this study, your identity will be kept strictly confidential. Your name and school will not appear in the study. Your stories will be referenced by a pseudo name. All transcripts will be kept on a CD-ROM in a secured office in the researcher’s home.

Please contact me by replying by email to bejohnson17@comcast.net or by mail to 2370 Gatetree Lane, SE Grand Rapids, MI 49546. Or you may feel free to contact me by phone at (616) 285-9843.

Sincerely,

Barb Johnson
Appendix B

HSIRB Approval Letter
Date: April 5, 2007

To: Louann Bierlein Palmer, Principal Investigator
Barbara Johnson, Student Investigator for dissertation

From: Amy Naugle, Ph.D., Chair

Re: HSIRB Project Number: 07-03-31

This letter will serve as confirmation that your research project entitled “Leadership-Influenced Practices that Impact Classroom Instruction Related to Writing: A Case Study of a Successful Elementary School” has been approved under the expedited category of review by the Human Subjects Institutional Review Board. The conditions and duration of this approval are specified in the Policies of Western Michigan University. You may now begin to implement the research as described in the application.

Please note that you may only conduct this research exactly in the form it was approved. You must seek specific board approval for any changes in this project. You must also seek reapproval if the project extends beyond the termination date noted below. In addition if there are any unanticipated adverse reactions or unanticipated events associated with the conduct of this research, you should immediately suspend the project and contact the Chair of the HSIRB for consultation.

The Board wishes you success in the pursuit of your research goals.

Approval Termination: April 5, 2008
Appendix C

Interview Protocol
Interview Protocol

Project:  Leadership-Influenced Practices that Impact Classroom Instruction Related to Writing: A Case Study of a Successful Elementary School

Time of interview:  

Date of interview:  

Location:  

Interviewer:  

Interviewee:  

Thank you for consenting to participate in this study. I would like to record the interview so the study can be as accurate as possible. You may request that the tape recorder be turned off at any point of the interview.

Questions that the subjects will be asked include:

1. Within your elementary school that has experienced significant increases in its students’ writing scores (including at-risk student subpopulations), to what extent and how do you believe the following leadership-influenced practices influenced those results and what key barriers were encountered regarding:

   a. Regarding systematic supervision of your principal and literacy specialist:

      • How does your principal supervise the school’s reaction to change in literacy strategies? How does your literacy specialist supervise the school’s reaction to change in literacy strategies?
      • Who encourages you to participate in researched instructional practices?
      • What impact does your principal or literacy specialist have on the learning culture of your school or district?
      • There are colleagues who participate in professional development opportunities and return to the classroom to implement their new learning and are met with lack of support. Please describe your experiences of being supported or unsupported by your school’s leadership.
      • What barriers were encountered regarding the systematic supervision for the use of new researched based instructional practices by your principal and literacy specialist?
      • How have you overcome these barriers?
b. Regarding the comprehensive curriculum of the *Grade Level Content Expectations*:

- What are the ways you learn about curriculum, i.e. *GLCEs*?
- How do you implement the curriculum as defined by the *GLCEs*?
- Generally, why do you adhere to the *GLCEs*?
- Does your district have the *GLCEs* attached to its school improvement plan? If so, what role did you play in creating this plan?
- What barriers were encountered regarding your use of the comprehensive curriculum of the *Grade Level Content Expectations*?
- How have you overcome these barriers?

c. Regarding supported professional development of curriculum, instruction, and assessment:

- What is your main purpose in participating in a professional development opportunity?
- What are the usual types of professional development you participate in? How often do you attend professional development activities?
- What professional development activity was most useful/helpful to you? What did you learn from the experience? What about the activity made it helpful?
- Have you experienced any frustrations when implementing new knowledge? If so, how did you respond to them?
- What barriers were encountered regarding professional development in the areas of curriculum, instruction, and assessment?
- How have you overcome these barriers?

d. Regarding your leaders’ knowledge of curriculum, instruction and assessment?

- When you want to discuss what you have learned from a professional development opportunity, with whom do you talk to at your school?
- How would you describe your school’s leadership in promoting your participation in professional development?
- Besides the formal professional development events, how often do you talk with other people in your school about improving teaching? With whom? In what setting? How would you describe your school’s leadership in promoting your participation in professional development?
- Who would you identify as your learning coach, if you have one? What barriers were encountered regarding your leaders’ having knowledge of curriculum, instruction and assessment?
- How have you overcome these barriers?
2. Within your school that has experienced significant increases in its students’ writing scores (including at-risk student sub-populations), to what extent and how do you believe the following classroom-based instructional practices influenced those results and what barriers were encountered:

a. phonics instruction;
   - To what extent did phonics instruction influence your students’ writing?
   - How? Can you tell me about one example.
   - What key barriers were encountered regarding new instructional practices having to do with phonics instruction?
   - What strategies were utilized for overcoming such barriers?

b. guided reading including basal;
   - To what extent did guided reading instruction influence your students’ writing?
   - How? Can you tell me about one example?
   - What key barriers were encountered regarding new instructional practices having to do with guided reading?
   - What strategies were utilized for overcoming such barriers?

c. self-selected reading of trade books;
   - To what extent did self-selecting reading influence your students’ writing?
   - How? Can you tell me about one example?
   - What key barriers were encountered regarding new instructional practices having to do with self-selected reading of trade books?
   - What strategies were utilized for overcoming such barriers?

d. writing instruction?
   - To what extent did writing instruction that included modeling, conferencing while students write, and sharing influence your students’ writing?
   - How? Can you tell me about one example?
   - What key barriers were encountered regarding new instructional practices having to do with writing instruction?
   - What strategies were utilized for overcoming such barriers?

Thank you for participating in this interview. If necessary, may I contact your for a follow up interview or to clarify some of your responses?
Questions for Leaders

1. As a leader, within your elementary school that has experienced significant increases in its students' writing scores (including at-risk student subpopulations), to what extent and how do you believe the following leadership-influenced practices influenced those results regarding and what were the barriers:

   a. the systematic supervision of the teachers:
      - How do you supervise the school reaction to change in literacy instruction?
      - Who encourages you to lead your school to participate in researched instructional practices?
      - What impact do you have on the learning culture of your school or district?
      - There are teachers who participate in professional development opportunities and return to the classroom to implement their new learning. Please describe your experiences of support for your teachers.
      - What barriers were encountered regarding your systematic supervision for the use of new researched based instructional practices by yourself and literacy specialist?
      - How have you overcome these barriers?

   b. the comprehensive curriculum of the Grade Level Content Expectations:
      - What are the ways you learn about curriculum, i.e. GLCEs?
      - How do you implement the curriculum as defined by the GLCEs?
      - Generally, why do you adhere to the GLCEs?
      - Does your district have the GLCEs attached to its school improvement plan? If so, what role did you play in creating this plan?
      - What barriers were encountered regarding your use of the comprehensive curriculum of the Grade Level Content Expectations?
      - How have you overcome these barriers?

   c. supported professional development of curriculum, instruction, and assessment:
      - What is your main purpose in participating in a professional development opportunity?
      - What are the usual types of professional development you participate in? How often do you attend professional development activities?
      - What professional development activity was most useful/helpful to you? What did you learn from the experience? What about the activity made it helpful?
      - Have you experienced any frustrations when implementing new knowledge at your building? If so, how did you respond to them?
      - What barriers were encountered regarding your use of the comprehensive curriculum of the Grade Level Content Expectations?
      - How have you overcome these barriers?
d. as leader, regarding your knowledge of curriculum, instruction and assessment?

- When you want to discuss what you have learned from a professional development opportunity, with whom do you talk to at your school?
- Besides the formal professional development events, how often do you talk with other people in your school about improving teaching? With whom? In what setting? What do you talk about?
- How would you describe your leadership in promoting your participation in professional development?
- Who would you identify as your school’s learning coach, if you have one?
- What barriers were encountered regarding your having knowledge of curriculum, instruction and assessment?
- How have you overcome these barriers?

2. Within your school that has experienced significant increases in its students’ writing scores (including at-risk student sub-populations), to what extent and how do you believe the following classroom-based instructional practices influenced those results:

a. phonics instruction;

- To what extent did phonics instruction impact your students’ writing?
- How? Can you give me one example?
- What key barriers were encountered regarding new instructional practices having to do with phonics instruction?
- What strategies were utilized for overcoming such barriers?

b. guided reading including basal;

- To what extent did guided reading instruction impact your students’ writing?
- How? Can you give me one example?
- What key barriers were encountered regarding new instructional practices having to do with guided reading?
- What strategies were utilized for overcoming such barriers?

c. self-selected reading of trade books;

- To what extent did self-selecting reading impact your students’ writing?
- How? Can you give me one example?
- What key barriers were encountered regarding new instructional practices having to do with self-selected reading of trade books?
- What strategies were utilized for overcoming such barriers?

d. writing instruction?
- To what extent did writing instruction that included modeling, conferencing while students write, and sharing impact your students' writing?
- How?
- What key barriers were encountered regarding new instructional practices having to do with writing instruction?
- What strategies were utilized for overcoming such barriers?

Thank you for participating in this interview. If necessary, may I contact you for a follow up interview or to clarify some of your responses?
Appendix D

Transcriptionist Confidentiality Form
Transcriptionist Confidentiality Form

I, __________________________, transcriptionist, agree to maintain full confidentiality in regards to any and all audiotapes and documentation received from ____ related to her doctoral study on __________. Furthermore, I agree:

1. To hold in strictest confidence the identification of any individual that may be inadvertently revealed during the transcription of audio taped interviews, or in any associated documents;

2. To not make copies of any audiotapes or computerized files of the transcribed interview texts, unless specifically requested to do so by ______;

3. To store all study-related audiotapes and materials in a safe, secure location as long as they are in my possession;

4. To return all audiotapes and study-related documents to ______ in a complete and timely manner.

I am aware that I can be held legally liable for any breach of this confidentiality agreement, and for any harm incurred by individuals if I disclose identifiable information contained in the audiotapes and/or files to which I will have access.

__________________________  __________________________
Signature                    Date
APPENDIX E

Thematic Distribution
Table A1

*Thematic Distribution*

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*Note.* Pseudonyms were used.
Appendix F

Summary of Participant Information Regarding Barriers
### Table A2

**Summary of Participant Information Regarding Barriers**

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<tr>
<td>Experienced barriers with professional development</td>
<td>x</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>x</td>
<td>x</td>
<td>x</td>
<td>x</td>
<td>x</td>
<td>x</td>
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<td></td>
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<td></td>
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<td></td>
<td>x</td>
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<tr>
<td>Experienced barriers with leaders’ knowledge</td>
<td>x</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>x</td>
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<td>x</td>
<td>x</td>
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<tr>
<td>Experienced barriers with framework</td>
<td>x</td>
<td>x</td>
<td></td>
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<td></td>
<td>x</td>
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<td>x</td>
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<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>Experienced barriers with phonics</td>
<td>x</td>
<td>x</td>
<td></td>
<td>x</td>
<td>x</td>
<td>x</td>
<td>x</td>
<td>x</td>
<td>x</td>
<td>x</td>
<td>x</td>
<td>x</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>x</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Experienced barriers with guided reading</td>
<td>x</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>x</td>
<td>x</td>
<td>x</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>x</td>
<td>x</td>
<td>x</td>
<td>x</td>
<td>x</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Experienced barriers with self-selected reading</td>
<td>x</td>
<td>x</td>
<td></td>
<td>x</td>
<td>x</td>
<td>x</td>
<td>x</td>
<td>x</td>
<td>x</td>
<td>x</td>
<td>x</td>
<td>x</td>
<td>x</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Experienced barriers with writing</td>
<td>x</td>
<td>x</td>
<td></td>
<td>x</td>
<td>x</td>
<td>x</td>
<td>x</td>
<td>x</td>
<td>x</td>
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<td>x</td>
<td>x</td>
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</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Note. Pseudonyms were used.
Appendix G

Comparison of Leadership Themes to Reeves' 2004 Theory of Accountability for Learning
Table A3

*Comparison of Leadership Themes to Reeves' Theory of Accountability for Learning*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Leadership</td>
<td>Leadership is accountable through being:</td>
<td>- knowledgeable about effective strategies</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>- coaches effective strategies</td>
<td>- discusses effective strategies</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>- supports effective strategies</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Curriculum</td>
<td>Curriculum experienced in three ways:</td>
<td>- discussed by teachers</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>- mapped out by teachers</td>
<td>- aligned to report cards by district</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Leaders</td>
<td>Leaders are accountable for learning:</td>
<td>- provides professional development related to effective classroom practice</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Teaching</td>
<td>Effective practices:</td>
<td>- are used in the classroom</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>- are recorded</td>
<td>- are assessed</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Framework for Teaching Strategies</td>
<td>Effective literacy strategies organized into a framework</td>
<td>- phonics</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>- guided reading</td>
<td>- self selected reading</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>- writing</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

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Appendix H

Comparison of Instructional Themes to Marzano's (2003) Study of Instructional Strategies
### Table A4

*Comparison of Instructional Themes to Marzano’s (2003) Study of Instructional Strategies that Affect Student Achievement*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Identifying similarities and differences</td>
<td>Identifying similarities and differences taught in four blocks</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Summarizing and Note Taking</td>
<td>Summarizing and note taking practiced in two blocks Guided, Self-selected</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Reinforcing effort and providing recognition</td>
<td>Reinforcement and recognition given during four blocks</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Homework and practice</td>
<td>Practice given four ways</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Nonlinguistic representations</td>
<td>Word activities involve the senses Phonics block</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cooperative learning</td>
<td>Cooperative learning in two ways: Phonics - Word games Guided - Cooperative learning</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Setting objectives and providing feedback</td>
<td>Feedback given four times and ways in four blocks</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Generating and testing hypotheses</td>
<td>Testing hypotheses done in: Guided – comprehension activity</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Questions, cues, and advance organizers</td>
<td>Questioning done in: Guided – comprehension</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

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Appendix I

Comparison of Instructional Themes to Cunningham & Hall's (1998) Literacy Framework
Table A5

Comparison of Instructional Themes to Cunningham & Hall’s (1998) Literacy Framework

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Checklist for Framework of Instructional Strategies is provided</td>
<td>Checklist for Framework of Instructional Strategies is used to supervise</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Leaders are knowledgeable about the strategies within the framework</td>
<td>Leaders are knowledgeable about the strategies within the framework</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Effective literacy strategies are organized into a framework - phonics - guided reading - self selected reading - writing</td>
<td>Effective literacy strategies are organized into a framework - phonics - guided reading - self selected reading - writing</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Curriculum is discussed and aligned with the report card for the instructional strategies in four blocks

Professional Development provided for instructional strategies of the four blocks
Appendix J

Comparison of Writing Practices to Calkins’ (1994) Framework of Effective Writing Strategies
Table A6

*Comparison of Writing Practices to Calkins’ (1994) Framework of Effective Writing Strategies*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Leadership not mentioned</td>
<td>Leadership related practices support writing</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Strategies not in a framework</td>
<td>Strategies organized into instructional framework</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Findings</td>
<td>Additional Practice of Findings</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Objective and Purpose to be viewed as authors</td>
<td>Practiced in writing block – model author’s craft, 6 Traits</td>
<td>Phonics - know word structure Guided – author’s purpose SS – know structure and genre</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Choose own topic</td>
<td>Practiced in writing block – choose own topic</td>
<td>Phonics - know word structure Guided – author’s purpose SS – read at grade level, enjoy</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Modeling</td>
<td>Practiced in writing block – model</td>
<td>Phonics – model how to write Guided – model think-aloud SS – model writing genre</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Revise</td>
<td>Practiced in writing block – conference</td>
<td>Phonics – working with words</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Write</td>
<td>Practiced in writing block – model</td>
<td>Phonics – on the back, transfer Guided – author’s purpose SS – conference about authors</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Share</td>
<td>Practiced in writing block – write, share</td>
<td>Phonics – share activities Guided - share SS - share</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>