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ACCEPTANCE

This dissertation, SIX MIDDLE SCHOOL ENGLISH LANGUAGE ARTS TEACHERS' BELIEFS ABOUT GRAMMAR AND THEIR TEACHING OF GRAMMAR WHILE PARTICIPATING IN A PROFESSIONAL LEARNING COMMUNITY, by ELLAH SUE MCCLURE, was prepared under the direction of the candidate's Dissertation Advisory Committee. It is accepted by the committee members in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree Doctor of Philosophy in the College of Education, Georgia State University.

The Dissertation Advisory Committee and the student's Department Chair, as representatives of the faculty, certify that this dissertation has met all standards of excellence and scholarship as determined by the faculty. The Dean of the College of Education concurs.

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ABSTRACT

SIX MIDDLE SCHOOL ENGLISH LANGUAGE ARTS TEACHERS' BELIEFS ABOUT GRAMMAR AND THEIR TEACHING OF GRAMMAR WHILE PARTICIPATING IN A PROFESSIONAL LEARNING COMMUNITY

by

Ellah Sue McClure

Historically, English language arts educators have strongly disagreed about the role of grammar instruction in students' literacy development (Weaver, 1996; Mulroy, 2003), and despite the importance of teachers' beliefs and the continuing controversy over grammar instruction, few studies have explored teachers' beliefs about the role of grammar instruction in English language arts education. The purpose of this qualitative, interpretive research was to investigate six middle school English language arts teachers' beliefs and practices related to grammar and the teaching of grammar. Social constructivism (Fosnot & Perry, 2005) and phenomenology (Schutz, 1967; Seidman, 1998) served as theoretical frameworks for the study. Four questions guided the research: (1) What are teachers' definitions of "grammar" as related to the teaching of English language arts? (2) What are teachers' beliefs about "grammar" and the teaching of grammar in English language arts? (3) What are teachers' reported sources of knowledge for grammar and the teaching of grammar in English language arts? (4) How does a professional development course on grammar instruction influence teachers' beliefs?

Data collection and analysis for this study occurred over a ten-month period. Data sources included an open-ended questionnaire; three in-depth, phenomenological interviews with each teacher (Seidman, 1998) before, during, and after the professional learning course; teacher artifacts and emails; field notes and transcriptions from videotaped course sessions; and a researcher's log. Constant comparison (Glaser & Strauss, 1967) was used to analyze data, and richly descriptive participant portraits (Merriam & Assoc., 2002) report the findings. Trustworthiness and rigor have been established through adherence to guidelines for establishing credibility, confirmability, dependability, and transferability (Lincoln & Guba, 1985).

The participants defined grammar in terms of rules, correctness, communication, and in relationships with various forms of literacy. They believed that students gain power through a mastery of Standard American English, grammar instruction is necessary to bolster students' performance on standardized tests, and both traditional and innovative methods for teaching grammar are valuable. They found the collaborative professional learning course to be worthwhile and useful for developing innovative approaches to grammar instruction. Finally, they reported a need for more easily accessible Internet resources for teaching grammar.

SIX MIDDLE SCHOOL ENGLISH LANGUAGE ARTS TEACHERS' BELIEFS ABOUT GRAMMAR AND THEIR TEACHING OF GRAMMAR WHILE PARTICIPATING IN A PROFESSIONAL LEARNING COMMUNITY

by
Ellah Sue McClure

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2006

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ABBREVIATIONS

ATEG	Assembly for the Teaching of English Grammar
AYP	Annual Yearly Progress
C-1; C-2	Card 1; Card 2
CRCT	Criterion Referenced Competency Test
I-1, I-2, I-3	Interview 1; Interview 2; Interview 3
NCTE	National Council of Teachers of English
NP	Noun Phrase
NWP	National Writing Project
PLC	Professional Learning Class
Q	Open-ended Questionnaire
SAE	Standard American English
TEEMS	Teacher Education in English, ESOL, Mathematics, Middle Childhood, Science, and Social Studies Education

CHAPTER ONE

INTRODUCTION

The Controversy over Grammar Instruction

When English language arts teachers gather, the topic of grammar inevitably arises. Standards for grammar and language usage (whether written or unwritten) exist in many public arenas, including public schools, universities and colleges, private businesses, and government offices. Many people gauge social acceptance based on usage of the grammar we call Standard or Academic English (Stott and Chapman, 2001; Mulroy, 2003; Sledd, 1993; National Commission on Writing, 2005), or what noted sociolinguist Geneva Smitherman (2002) has termed the "language of wider communication."

Historically, English language arts educators have strongly disagreed about the role of grammar instruction in students' literacy development (Weaver, 1996; Mulroy, 2003). Some researchers and scholars believe that the grammar of Standard English should not be taught because all dialects are of equal value (Birch, 2001; Crisco, 2004; hooks, 1994; McWhorter, 1998). Others believe that students must learn the grammatical rules of Standard English in order to increase their acceptance in American institutions (Ehrenworth & Vinton, 2005; Kroch, 1978; Stern, 1997; National Commission on Writing, 2005). This long-time controversy about the role of grammar and grammar instruction in English language arts continues today.

The term “grammar” may be defined in many ways. Grammar is the essence of language. Whenever any person speaks or writes, he or she uses grammar in one way or another because each language and dialect has its own set of unwritten rules that determine how it is spoken or written (McWhorter, 1998). Weaver (1996) suggests that teachers define grammar in the following ways: syntax, rhetoric, prescriptive rules, usage, structure, and parts of speech. In a pilot study during the summer of 2005, I asked a class of preservice secondary English teachers to define grammar. The preservice teachers defined grammar in similar terms to Weaver’s, but they also included definitions related to mechanics. Many scholars define grammar using traditional terms. Traditional grammar includes definitions of parts of speech and rules for using them in sentence construction. It is sometimes called “prescriptive” because it relies on rules to determine correct “usage” (Noguchi, 1991; Weaver, 1996; Mulroy, 2003; Schuster, 2003). As Williams (1999) suggests, “In nearly every instance, school grammar is traditional grammar. It is concerned primarily with correctness and with the categorical names for the words that make up sentences” (p. 5). *The Teacher’s Grammar Book* by James Williams (1999) discusses key components of grammars that have been offered as alternatives to traditional grammar during the last century. Williams first describes traditional grammar through its history, its components, its rules, and the way various structures work within sentences. The second grammar Williams describes is phrase-structure grammar. Phrase structure grammar is a descriptive grammar. The rules for this grammar describe, rather than prescribe, sentence structure or utterances. One understands these utterances or sentences by using tree diagrams that show the relationships between words and by using letters to symbolize phrases within sentences,

such as NP representing noun phrase. Williams' third grammar is transformational-generative grammar. Chomsky's criticism of phase-structure grammar served to introduce transformational-generative grammar. This grammar says that there are deep structures, or the beginnings of sentences, that occur as the sentence is formed in the mind. Surface structures transform deep structures, and, thus, we have many different sentence structures. Another grammar Williams describes is cognitive grammar. Cognitive grammar explains language through processes that occur in the brain. Grammar is "nothing more than a system for describing the patterns of regularity that are inherent in language" (Williams, 1999, p. 232).

Another scholar, Hartwell (1985), defines five different grammars. Hartwell built on the 1954 work of Nelson Francis and that of Martha Kolln in order to define grammar. The first grammar Hartwell describes is "the set of formal patterns in which the words of a language are arranged in order to convey larger meanings" (p. 108). Native speakers use this grammar in order to communicate with each other. The second grammar is "the branch of linguistic science which is concerned with the description, analysis, and formulization of formal language patterns" (p. 108). This grammar tries to describe, analyze, and write down the unwritten rules of Grammar 1. It is constantly changing. The third grammar is "linguistic etiquette" (p. 108). This grammar deals with the social usage of grammar and is most often associated with the "rules." The fourth grammar is the one used in schools. Today, we would call this Academic English. The fifth grammar deals with style and rhetoric. Weaver's and Hartwell's definitions of grammar are similar, even though the terminology in discussion varies.

The Assembly for the Teaching of English Grammar, a division of National Council of Teachers of English, (2004) says the following about grammar:

> Grammar is important because it is the language that makes it possible for us to talk about language. Grammar names the types of words and word groups that make up sentences not only in English but in any language. As human beings, we can put sentences together even as children – we can all *do* grammar. But to be able to talk about how sentences are built, about the types of words and word groups that make up sentences – that is knowing about grammar. (NCTE, 2004, p. 1)

Each writer determines the definition(s) he or she chooses to use in order to discuss grammar. Noguchi (1991) uses traditional terms to discuss grammar, choosing to use terminology as it relates to sentence construction and writing. Mulroy (2003) believes in strict adherence to traditional grammar. Ehrenworth and Vinton (2005) discuss grammar in terms of usage and the societal power of academic English. Schuster (2003), like Hartwell, identifies multiple grammars: the system of rules used by native speakers, universally agreed upon usage rules, editing rules, and myth rules. Schuster's "myth rules" are the rules that drive many people to dislike or fear of grammar. They are rules that grammarians have devised and accepted over a long period of time that sometimes do not fit the way language is used by native speakers or by the universally accepted rules. An example of a myth rule would be that you do not insert a word between "to" and an infinitive. Native speakers frequently break this "split infinitive" rule. The "myth rules" that Schuster identifies are the source of many of the controversies in grammar.

With the many ways grammar can be defined, how do I choose to define grammar for this study? First, I have asked each of the participating teachers in this study to define grammar in his or her terms. Second, the study participants and I examined grammar

from the perspective of usage. We read texts and practiced lessons that incorporated grammar within the writing context. Third, how do I define grammar? Since I have asked the participants to explore their beliefs about grammar, I have also examined my own beliefs. I understand the way Hartwell defines the distinctive grammars, and, after carefully considering the term, I find that I also define grammar in multiple ways. I believe that each person has a native ability to learn grammar in order to communicate and that grammar is learned in the social context of the home and community. That is the first grammar, and I call it the home language. I also believe that there is a wider communication tool that we call Academic English. This grammar is prescriptive and rule bound and allows its users to conform to certain settings more easily. When I think of Academic English, I also include mechanics and usage for completeness. Personally, I find Academic English beautifully intricate and detailed. It offers order in an often-chaotic world. I believe that there is also a technical professional grammar or jargon. Jargon allows members of particular groups to communicate more effectively with each other, but it is not necessary for others to have proficiency and is not meant for wider communication. There are also grammars that groups of people use in order to set themselves apart into tightly knit social groups. I have listed four distinctive grammars, but there are more. As people learn new grammars, they learn to switch among these grammars for various settings. Proficiency in switching grammars occurs over a period of time and with practice. This ability to switch between grammars of various dialects is called “code-switching” (Williams, 2003). Defining grammar is difficult because of the multiple meanings, and I have asked much of the participants when I asked them to define it in their own terms.

Linguists refer to grammar as the rules that govern the structure of language (McWhorter, 1998; Williams, 2003), but many people think of grammar simply as a combination of proper usage, mechanics, and syntax (National Commission on Writing, 2005). Grammar was one of the original three "R's" when American public schools began (Schuster, 2003). In many classrooms today, grammar instruction is very similar to the grammar of the first established public schools in this country (Weaver, 1996). When grammar is taught by methods such as workbooks, textbook exercises, and memorization, it is often called "traditional grammar." Linguists began researching these traditional grammar teaching methods over one hundred years ago and determined that evidence did not exist to support teaching it in these traditional ways (see Braddock, Lloyd-Jones, & Schoer, 1963; Hillocks, 1986). Research findings of the early 1960s were widely accepted in the academic community, but classroom teachers continued to teach traditional grammar. Scholars have pointed out many reasons why teachers continue to teach traditional grammar. For example, Weaver (1996), one of the foremost authorities on the teaching of grammar in context, outlines twelve reasons for the persistence of traditional approaches, but there are probably many more, or at least variations on the twelve reasons. Among the twelve reasons Weaver offers are (1) that teachers are unaware of the research or do not believe the research. She also suggests several beliefs that teachers may have that cause them to continue to teach grammar: (2) that students need to know grammar in order to write, (3) traditional grammar is easier to grade, (4) their school systems require the teaching of grammar, (5) they feel pressured to teach grammar, (6) some students learn grammar better through traditional teaching, and

(7) and they are afraid their students will miss out on something if they do not teach grammar.

Are English language arts teachers actually aware of the research on the effects of grammar instruction? What do teachers believe about the role of grammar in students' writing and literacy development? How do these teachers' beliefs and perceptions about grammar affect their curriculum and instruction? We know that teachers' beliefs about students' language use greatly influence their decisions about classroom instruction and, ultimately, play a significant role in student literacy development (Richardson, 1994; Gabrielatos, 2002). Teachers' beliefs and perceptions are very important because teachers determine the enacted curriculum in their classrooms. As one researcher states, "Teachers' perceptions and knowledge of language influence the way they teach" (Gabrielatos, 2002, p. 78). Researchers have made us aware that a teacher must have knowledge of the subject and of the pedagogy that is inherent to the subject in order to teach a subject effectively (Ringstaff & Sandholtz, 2002; Johnston & Goettsch, 2000). A search of online research sources and hard copies of journals produced some studies about teachers' beliefs about instruction (Briggs & Paillotet, 1997; Donovan, 1990; Fox, 1995; Kenkel & Yates, 2003), but I found no research studies about English language arts teachers' beliefs about grammar and the role of grammar instruction in the English language arts classroom.

Purpose of the Study, Guiding Questions, and Methodological Overview

Despite the importance of the role of teachers' beliefs about students' language use and the continuing controversy over grammar instruction, I found no studies that explored teachers' beliefs about the role of grammar instruction in English language arts

education. The current study seeks to fill an important gap in the existing research literature by investigating teacher beliefs about the grammar and grammar instruction. The purpose of this qualitative, interpretive research was to investigate middle school English language arts teachers' beliefs and practices related to grammar and the teaching of grammar. Social constructivism (Fosnot & Perry, 2005) and phenomenology (Schutz, 1967; Seidman, 1998) served as theoretical frameworks for the study.

Four research questions guided the study:

1. What are teachers' definitions of "grammar" as related to the teaching of English language arts?
2. What are teachers' beliefs about "grammar" and the teaching of grammar in English language arts?
3. What are teachers' reported sources of knowledge for grammar and the teaching of grammar in English language arts?
4. How does a professional learning course on grammar instruction techniques influence teachers' beliefs about grammar and the teaching of grammar?

Participants in the study were six middle school language arts teachers who voluntarily enrolled in a five-week professional learning course related to the teaching of grammar in English language arts classrooms. Data collection and analysis began in February 2006 and continued through August 2006, while more intensive data analysis and writing took place during September 2006. Data sources included an open-ended questionnaire; three in-depth, phenomenological interviews with each teacher (Seidman, 1998) before, during, and after the professional development course; teacher artifacts and

email journals; field notes and transcriptions from videotaped course sessions; and a researcher's log. Data were analyzed through the constant comparative method (Glaser & Strauss, 1967), and richly descriptive participant portraits (Merriam & Assoc, 2002) report the findings. Trustworthiness and rigor were established through adherence to guidelines for establishing credibility, confirmability, dependability, and transferability (Lincoln & Guba, 1985).

In the paragraphs that follow, I provide an overview of the theoretical framework for the study. Subsequent chapters of this document offer an extensive review of the literature as well as a detailed discussion of the research design and methods for the study.

Theoretical Framework

Theories of constructivism and phenomenology were the lenses through which I studied the beliefs of English language arts teachers about grammar and the teaching of grammar. Beliefs are those things that people accept as valid or true (Belief, 2005). Examples of beliefs about grammar might be as follows: "It is necessary to teach traditional grammar in order for students to learn grammar so they may write more effectively" or "Students must learn to identify the parts of speech in order to write well." M. Frank Pajares (1992) analyzed multiple research studies about teachers' beliefs. His synthesis of more than 50 research studies serves to define "beliefs" as they relate to educational research: "Belief change during adulthood is a relatively rare phenomenon" (p. 325); beliefs form early through "cultural transmission" (p. 325) and resist change over time and experiences; "Knowledge and beliefs are inextricably intertwined" (p. 325); beliefs have a filter system to adapt new phenomena and prioritize it as it relates to

other beliefs; and beliefs “strongly” (p. 326) influence perception and affect behavior. Pajares concludes, “Beliefs about teaching are well established by the time a student gets to college” (p. 326).

Constructivism

Constructivism is a theory of learning that allows researchers to study knowledge and how people learn or attain that knowledge (Ismat, 1998). Three major tenets comprise constructivism. First, knowledge is constructed in the mind of the individual through a process of interaction between the individual’s beliefs and stored knowledge and new ideas with which he or she comes into contact. Second, an individual acquires knowledge through involvement with content, rather than through repetition and memorization of a teacher’s knowledge. Third, knowledge has social contexts (Ismat, 1998). Constructivism is a broad theory that is associated with the cognitive theories of Piaget and Vygotsky (Glasersfeld, 2005). Piaget influenced educational theory by introducing the ideas of the stages of mental development in children. He believed that knowledge is a continual process of construction and reorganization of thoughts and ideas. To him, thinking was the transformation of intellectual operations from one state to another (Piaget, 1968). Vygotsky (1978) examined the theories of Piaget and hypothesized that “the developmental process lags behind the learning process; this sequence then results in zones of proximal development” (p. 90). The zone of proximal development is defined as the area where a student can learn new material by building on previous knowledge. These theories seem contradictory, but Vygotsky built on Piaget’s theories of stages of development.

Constructivism is also associated with the educational theorist John Dewey. John Dewey espoused a number of ideas, yet one that is significant to constructivism suggests that learners are driven by interest in subject matter that is important to them as individuals. This idea can be found in Dewey's pedagogic creed published in 1897. In his creed, Dewey also said that all education involves the stimulation of the child in social settings with the result being social consciousness. There are psychological and sociological aspects to the educational process, with both being equally important. Schools are primarily social institutions where the child should be stimulated in the same way he or she was stimulated in the home environment during earlier learning phases (Dewey, 1897).

Current educational practitioners who use the theory of constructivism build on Piaget's idea that an individual will not learn until developmentally ready and Vygotsky's idea that learning occurs where there is an overlap between previous knowledge and new concepts. In the constructivist theory, learning is developmental, errors are necessary to learning, and environment is important to learning (Fosnot & Perry, 2005). All of these ideas have influenced the teaching we see in contemporary schools. Some examples of constructivist ideas in education are authentic assessment measures such as portfolios and student self-evaluation of work, "challenging tasks to elicit higher-order thinking" (Shepard, 2004, p. 1626), ongoing assessment throughout instruction, and the idea that all students can learn (Shepard, 2004). Another current example of constructivist ideas in education is the Teacher Education in English, ESOL, Mathematics, Middle Childhood, Science, and Social Studies Education (TEEMS) program at Georgia State University in Atlanta, Georgia. The TEEMS program immerses prospective and current teachers

working at a Master's degree level in a cooperative learning setting where students are asked to prepare lessons, share with their learning cohort, examine research, examine texts, and examine their own pedagogical beliefs.

How does constructivism relate to the study of teachers' beliefs and perceptions about grammar? Constructivist programs in teacher education follow two paths: developmental and social reconstructionist (Ismat, 1998). Teacher education programs that follow the developmental path typically employ traditional teaching methods that inform teachers of alternative methods of teaching, often without allowing students to experience using constructivist methods. Since teachers do not have practice using the alternative methods, it is difficult to use them in their classrooms, and they sometimes revert to the more familiar traditional methods rather than constructivist methods. The second type of teacher education program follows the social reconstructionist model. That model encourages teachers to examine their own beliefs and practices, explore the effects, and consider alternatives that would be more effective for their students (Ismat, 1998). In other words, this model supports reflection as integral to practice. A good example of this method of teacher preparation is teachers being asked to prepare lessons or teaching activities and try them with other prospective teachers in their education classes. By experiencing lessons as teachers/learners, preservice teachers are better prepared to implement these types of lessons in their own classrooms. This is used by the National Writing Project (Lieberman & Wood, 2002). Fosnot (2005) stresses the importance of teacher learning experiences when she says,

> Just as young learners construct, so, too, do teachers. Teacher education programs based on a constructivist view of learning need to do more than offer a constructivist perspective in a course or two. Teachers' beliefs need to be illuminated, discussed, and challenged. (p. 274)

The social reconstructionist model of constructivism enabled me to invite teachers to reflect on their own practices during the professional development class that is part of this investigation, but I also used the more in-depth questioning that phenomenology invites to have teachers further explore and reflect on their beliefs about grammar and the teaching of grammar.

Phenomenology

English language arts teachers may understand grammar in varying ways based on individual educational experiences. Phenomenology seeks to understand the experiences of individuals in everyday settings (Merriam & Assoc., 2002). In this way, the beliefs English language arts teachers have about grammar and the teaching of grammar are phenomena that can be explored through the lens of phenomenology. Also, participation in a professional learning course as a means of professional development is a phenomenon in which teachers frequently participate. Thus, the current study examines two phenomena: grammar and the professional learning course.

Alfred Schutz (1967), a leading pioneer in phenomenology, bases his description of phenomenology on the work of Bergson's (1938) *Time and Free Will* and Husserl's (1928) *Phenomenology of Internal Time Consciousness*. Bergson's work deals with the phenomenon of "inner duration," and Husserl's work deals with the "systematic phenomenological descriptions of the genesis of meaning" (Schutz, p. 43). Schutz's philosophy suggests that people live in a flow of "duration." "Duration" is the continual flow of lived experiences that take meaning only when they are viewed as past experiences. Schutz defines meaning as "merely an operation of intentionality, which, however, only becomes visible to the reflective glance" (p. 52). The actor, or person

performing an action, is experiencing "prephenomenal" behavior because the meaning of the action does not become clear until one reflects on the behavior and gives it meaning; therefore, not all experiences are meaningful. The actor may engage in "purposive action," or planned action. Schutz defines action as follows: "(1) a lived experience that is (2) guided by a plan or project arising from a subject's spontaneous activity and (3) distinguished from all other lived experiences by a peculiar Act of attention" (p. 215). The actor defines the action in terms of goals. Because the actor sees the action as goals set for the future, the actor is actually looking at the anticipated action as if it is in the past or has already occurred (Schutz, 1967). Conscious action includes the action as it occurs and attention to the activity before and after it occurs. This attention to action is called "map-consulting" (Schutz, p. 63) and distinguishes conscious actions from "unconscious" actions. The meaning a person ascribes to an action differs before and after the action because of discrepancies between what was planned and what occurred. Schutz states that some experiences are "taken-for-granted" (p. 74). An individual does not believe that "taken-for-granted" experiences need further analysis; however, if the individual brings one of these experiences to attention, then it becomes "problematic" and can be analyzed for meaning. Schutz states that the meaning each individual ascribes to an experience differs from the meaning someone else ascribes to the experience.

When used in educational research, researchers focus on the descriptive aspects of phenomenology based on the ideas of Schutz, Bergson, and Husserl. "The researcher's focus is thus on neither the human subject nor the human world but on the essence of the meaning of the interaction…. Phenomenological research addresses questions about common, everyday human experiences" (Merriam & Assoc., 2002, p. 93). Researchers

bracket the essences of experiences for comparison and analysis. They compare and analyze these essences and describe them. Phenomenologists set aside their own attitudes and beliefs in order to relate the beliefs and perceptions of the participants in their research (Merriam & Assoc., 2002). Since phenomenologists are interested in people's lived experiences, one of the best ways of discovering those experiences and the beliefs surrounding them is to ask the involved individuals.

As a qualitative researcher in education, Seidman (1998) developed a method of interviewing that is phenomenologically based. This method asks participants to explore their history with a phenomenon through a series of open-ended questions. The interviews take place in three distinct sessions. The first interview asks questions that deal with the individual's history with the phenomenon. The second interview concentrates on the participant's experiences with the phenomenon in the present setting. The third interview asks the individual to reflect on the meaning of the experience. In-depth phenomenological questioning is a good choice for this research on teachers' beliefs about grammar and the role of grammar in writing instruction because it asks teachers to define grammar, recall their history with grammar, and explore their beliefs about grammar. The participants were able to reflect on their experiences and ascribe meaning to them. Therefore, the methodology for this study was closely linked to the theoretical framework. Constructivism and aspects of phenomenology guided data collection throughout the professional learning course, the three interviews, and other aspects of this study.

Chapter One defined the terms "grammar," "beliefs," "phenomenology," and "constructivism" as they are used in this study. In order to elucidate the controversies

surrounding grammar instruction, Chapter Two offers a detailed review of literature focusing on some of the historical aspects of grammar instruction, research related to grammar instruction, the writing process as it relates to grammar instruction, research related to teacher beliefs, and research related to professional development that may influence teacher beliefs and perceptions. Chapter Three provides a thorough overview and discussion of the research design and methodology for this study. Chapter Four presents results associated with the first three guiding questions that related to definitions of grammar, beliefs about grammar and the teaching of grammar, and teacher-reported sources of knowledge of grammar. Chapter Five relates results associated with the fourth research question about the effects of a professional learning course on the beliefs of teachers about grammar and the teaching of grammar. Finally, Chapter Six presents an analysis of results in relation to the professional literature, discusses limitations of the study, and offers suggestions for further research.

CHAPTER TWO

REVIEW OF RELEVANT LITERATURE

Introduction

This chapter consists of a review of literature as it relates to the current study. First, I will give a brief summary of the history of grammar instruction, including two landmark studies that affect the way researchers view grammar currently. Second, I will present literature that shows the connection between grammar and writing instruction. Third, I will review literature on teacher beliefs about teaching. Last, I will discuss professional development practices, with particular emphasis on the National Writing Project model since that is the model used in this study.

Historical Aspects of Grammar Instruction

Aristotle of ancient Greece, an early teacher and philosopher, taught grammar to his students. He and many others in subsequent centuries thought that grammar brought a sense of order to society, disciplined the mind and soul, and allowed students to think logically. This was a framework for much of European education throughout the Middle Ages (Weaver, 1996). Early schools in the United States also adopted this philosophy (Hartwell, 1985; Schuster, 2003).

Researchers and scholars have pointed out that grammatical usage has often been held in high esteem in U.S. society because of the belief that correct usage of the English language provides acceptance into society (Schuster, 2003; Weaver, 1996). In the early history of England, children of the nobility learned Latin grammar in order to read and

understand manuscripts. In the 1700s, the new wealthy middle class wanted their children educated and accepted into society. Robert Lowth published an early English grammar, *A Short Introduction to English Grammar*, basing his rules on the dialect of English of the prominent wealthy class, and other grammar books followed. These early grammar books were the beginning of "standard" or "academic" grammar. "Standard English" uses a prescribed set of grammatical rules. "Academic English" is grammar that uses a prescribed set of rules for writing in schools, universities, and most public settings. Lowth chose his set of rules based on prestige of language, even though other grammars of his time had their own rules of usage. When the United States established its school system, grammar was one of the first classes taught, and the choice of texts was based on texts used in Europe (Schuster, 2003). Today, educators refer to the teaching method that uses a prescribed set of grammar rules as "traditional grammar." Traditional grammar teaching practices include standard rules, practice exercises, and memorization (Schuster, 2003).

As enrollment in the schools of the United States grew, the public began to think it was the school's responsibility to prepare students to become better workers in nonacademic fields. Early progressivism took hold with the ideas of John Dewey. He believed that the grammar of the early 1900s to mid 1900s relied too heavily on rote memorization of rules. Other progressive educators, including William Kilpatrick, decided that formal instruction in grammar was not necessary. They proposed activities that would bring about the natural experience of language unencumbered by mechanical rules (Mulroy, 2003). Later, linguists such as Fries and Chomsky took the view that grammar rules are arbitrary rules that have no definite foundation.

One of the early linguists who found fault with traditional grammar was Charles Fries. In 1952, he published *The Structure of English: An Introduction to the Construction of English Sentences*. This text asserted that there is no good definition of the sentence. Fries said that he had identified over two hundred definitions of sentences. He said that the definition used in most schools, "A sentence is a group of words expressing a complete thought" (p. 9) does not work. He said that most people rely on capitalization and end marks to determine sentences, but that sometimes does not work because of fragments and run-ons. He says that for his book he accepts the definition of Bloomfield, "Each sentence is an independent linguistic form not included by virtue of any grammatical construction in any larger linguistic form" (Fries, 1952, p. 21). Mulroy (2003) disputes linguistic theory and says that the traditional definition of the sentence is based on the definition that Aristotle gave of the declarative sentence, "groups of words arranged in such a way that they join a subject and a predicate and can, therefore, be judged to be true or false" (p. 68). In an interview with Kingsland (2003), Mulroy stated that grammar is being neglected in our schools because educators wrongly believe that writing and speaking Standard English has no real value. Conklin and Lourie (1983) take the stance that language is culturally related and that traditional grammar is the way one societal group imposes its norms on another societal group. They point out that many English teachers classify any grammar other than Standard American English as "bad grammar." These sociolinguists say that traditional grammar is "prescriptive" in that it seeks to correct the "errors" students make in their oral and written language. Conversely, linguists such as Bizzell, Dunn, and Lindblum realize the need for Standard American English in some situations. Teachers expect students to have knowledge of

basic grammar structures when they create academic writing. These linguists suggest that teachers should be aware of the home dialects of their students and acknowledge that these dialects are just as effective in some settings as standard American English is in other settings (Bizzell, 1986; Dunn and Lindblum, 2003).

Chomsky, a linguist of the 1950s and 1960s, influenced the direction language would take for the next forty years. Noam Chomsky's *Syntactic Structures* (1957) and subsequent *Aspects of the Theory of Syntax* (1965) proposed a grammar that was very specific about the word order and construction of sentences. Chomsky suggests a generative or transformational grammar and believes that traditional grammars were insufficient to explain language development:

> This is the traditional grammar problem of descriptive linguistics, and traditional grammars give a wealth of information concerning structural descriptions of sentences. However, valuable as they obviously are, traditional grammars are deficient in that they leave unexpressed many of the basic regularities of the language with which they are concerned. This fact is particularly clear on the level of syntax, where no traditional or structuralist grammar goes beyond classification of particular examples to the stage of formulation of generative rules on any significant scale. (Chomsky, 1965, p. 5)

Chomsky's work began the transformative-generative movement in grammar.

The ideas of Chomsky and other linguists influenced researchers who set out to prove grammar should not be taught using traditional methods. Researchers decided to test linguists' theories to see which grammar was more effective, transformational or traditional grammar. The work that most opponents of traditional grammar cite is the 1963 study by Richard Braddock, Richard Lloyd-Jones, and Lowell Schoer. Findings from their meta-analyses of many research studies that focused on grammar instruction have become universally known and accepted. The quotation from their work that is

most frequently cited is as follows: “The teaching of formal grammar has a negligible or, because it usually displaces some instruction and practice in composition, even a harmful effect on improvement in writing” (Braddock, Lloyd-Jones, & Schoer, 1963, p. 37-38). Braddock, Lloyd-Jones and Schoer’s pronouncement is significant because their conclusion is based on an analysis of 504 research articles that explored the effect of grammar instruction. The second source that opponents of traditional grammar often cite is Hillocks (1986). In his analysis of research that was a follow-up and update of the Braddock, Lloyd-Jones, & Shoer study, Hillocks found over 6,000 research articles. He narrowed his study to 150 dissertations and concluded:

> The study of traditional grammar . . . has no effect on raising the quality of student writing. . . . Taught in certain ways, grammar and mechanics instruction has a deleterious effect on student writing. . . . We need to learn how to teach standard usage and mechanics after careful task analysis and with minimal grammar. (Hillocks, 1986, p. 248-249)

The work of these researchers changed the way academicians viewed the teaching of grammar. Books and articles about alternative methods of teaching grammar followed (i.e. Weaver, 1996, Hartwell, 1986, Noguchi, 1991), and one of the reasons for the writing process movement was a frustration with traditional grammar instruction.

Writing and Grammar Instruction

Based on the research that indicated that the teaching of traditional grammar had no positive effect on writing, in 1985, the National Council of Teachers of English (NCTE) adopted an official resolution about grammar:

> Resolved, that the National Council of Teachers of English affirm the position that the use of isolated grammar and usage exercises not supported by theory and research is a deterrent to the improvement of students’ speaking and writing and that, in order to improve both of these, class time at all levels must be devoted to opportunities for meaningful listening, speaking, reading, and writing; and that NCTE urge the

> discontinuance of testing practices that encourage the teaching of grammar rather than English language arts instruction. (Resolution on Grammar Exercises to Teach Speaking and Writing, 1985)

Since NCTE is such a large body of educators and has such great influence, traditional grammar, taught in isolation, might have died right there, but it did not. The edict said that teachers should not use isolated exercises to teach grammar. Teachers, knowing that students needed knowledge of how to use grammar effectively in their writing, began to look for ways to teach grammar within the context of writing (Mulroy, 2003). As Weaver (1996) suggests, the question became not *if* we should teacher grammar, but *how*.

Following the publication of the Braddock, Lloyd-Jones, and Schoer research (1963), the writing process movement in English language arts took hold. Educators frequently cite Janet Emig's (1971) work, *The Composing Processes of Twelfth Graders*, as the beginning of the process movement in writing. Although today's literature frequently varies in names given to the various stages of the writing process, they are prewriting, planning, drafting, pausing, reading, revising, editing, and publishing or final draft (Williams, 2003). Another early name in the process movement was Donald Graves who researched the writing processes of seven-year-old children and found that children in informal environments have greater choice in their writing, and that children write more when they are not given formal assignments. He found that girls write more than boys and that boys and girls produce different types of writing. He also found that developmental factors also affect writing outcomes (Graves, 1994). Donald Murray (1991), a Pulitzer Prize winning author turned writing teacher, discussed his work with students. He said that all writing is autobiographical and that educators should ask children to write about topics that are of interest to them. Peter Elbow declared that

students are capable of *Writing without Teachers* (1973) and that *Everyone Can Write* (2000). Elbow's titles indicate two of the concepts of the writing process movement that he explored in his books. These are only four of the many scholars who added to the knowledge we have about the writing process.

As the writing movement was exploring student writing and methods of teaching the writing process, other researchers (i.e. Weaver, 1996) began to examine ways to teach grammar in the context of writing. Traditional grammar methods were the most commonly used methods in most classrooms. These methods are prescriptive, or seek to correct errors in grammar as defined by a set of rules. Other methods that have been used are "phrase-structure" grammar that was a descriptive grammar. Phrase-structure grammar has a notation system for such things as noun phrases and verb phrases. Each sentence construction can be broken down and described using the notation system. The next grammar that appeared in the 1950s replaced phrase-structure grammar. It is transformational-generative grammar, or shortened to transformational grammar. This grammar was also descriptive and attempted to show how sentence parts were related to each other. Sentence combining was a method of trying to teach transformational grammar (Williams, 2003). Author and educator William Strong is an advocate of sentence combining, a method that relies on a student's natural knowledge of the way grammar works. It is an effective method of teaching students about types of sentences and clauses (Strong, 2004).

One of the leading scholars in the field of grammar, sociolinguist Constance Weaver, has written many articles and books about methods of teaching grammar in context. Weaver believes that there is no justification for traditional systematic teaching

of grammar. In *Teaching Grammar in Context*, she presents twelve reasons she believes teachers still teach traditional grammar, even though she believes the research clearly opposes it. She also suggests many ways to incorporate grammar in the teaching of writing. A few of the ways she suggests for teaching grammar in context using examples from student writing or literature to teach a grammar concept, have students help each other edit, and teach concepts in mini-lessons (Weaver, 1996). Another author/researcher, Rei Noguchi, has found alternative ways to teach grammar. In *Grammar and the Teaching of Writing: Limits and Possibilities* (1991), Noguchi offers many insights into how grammar fits into writing. He discusses negative and positives in the teaching of grammar. He also looks at grammar from the perspective of a native speaker and covers ways to teach students about elements of language usage such as run-ons, comma splices, fragments, pronoun usage, subjects, and verbs. He believes that students should be taught a "writer's grammar" (p. 38) and should only be taught the aspects of grammar that relate to their writing (Noguchi, 1991). Two researchers who used Noguchi's ideas, Sue Minchew and Vincent McGrath, conducted a study of the effectiveness of cooperative editing versus traditional editing. In a follow-up study, they found that the group who did cooperative editing had an 82% retention rate of editing techniques. This was higher than the group taught traditional editing techniques through lecture, textbook, and practice exercises. Even though the study was conducted with college students, these findings could be adapted to other levels of students. Group editing techniques used Noguchi's methods (Minchew & McGrath, 2001).

Edgar Schuster (2003) says in order to understand how to use grammar in written compositions, the writer must first know the rules. After learning the rules, the writer can

see how professional writers frequently break those rules. The question is, if teachers do not teach traditional grammar, when and how do you learn the rules? Another author who takes a different approach to teaching grammar within the context of writing is Harry Noden, a middle school teacher, who uses literature, paintings, and music to encourage sentence variety and creativity in his students (Noden, 1999). Recently, entire issues of four NCTE publications, *Voices from the Middle* (Vol. 8, 2001), *English Journal* (Vol. 92, 2003), *English Journal (*Vol. 95, 2006), and *English Leadership Quarterly* (Vol. 27, No.1, August 2004) were devoted to grammar issues and the many creative ways teachers have found to teach grammar. These issues included multiple articles written by teacher-practitioners about ways they currently teach grammar.

One current author in the literacy field who believes that the conclusions drawn by Braddock, Lloyd-Jones, and Schoer (1963) and Hillocks (1986) are flawed is David Mulroy. He says that, "Nothing would do more to improve students' knowledge of grammar than taking steps to ensure that K-12 teachers themselves understand basic concepts" (p. 115). He believes that students need to know grammar in order to understand and interpret literature that they read, a reason not usually mentioned when discussions of grammar arise. He also believes that the people who have decided that teaching grammar is a bad idea ignore this aspect of grammar. He recommends the traditional process of diagramming as a way of helping students learn sentence structure in order to make sense of different genres of literature. Mulroy belongs to a group call the Assembly for the Teaching of English Grammar (ATEG). ATEG is an assembly of NCTE. Their web site, www.ateg.org, offers tips for the teaching of grammar, many of which are those espoused by transformationalists.

One of the important outgrowths of the writing process movement was the formation of the National Writing Project (NWP) in 1974 at the University of California-Berkeley. Since then, local sites around the country give teachers an opportunity to work with other teachers to share best practices in writing. The NWP promotes teachers as writers, leaders, and colleagues who work together to improve student writing (Lieberman & Wood, 2003). Multiple local NWP chapters still meet each year and provide teachers with opportunities to learn better methods of teaching writing. These practices rarely mention grammar because the focus is on writing. The NWP, however, does offer insight into ways that teachers can better facilitate grammar instruction. One of the major ideas in the summer workshops of the NWP is that teachers share best practices (teachers teaching teachers). Through the sharing of these lessons in workshops, teachers learn best practices in writing instruction and methods to employ the lessons (Lieberman & Wood, 2003).

Teacher Beliefs

Grammar Instruction

In previous years, students memorized traditional grammar rules and parsed sentences from grammar texts (or analyzed and described the grammatical structures of sentences). If they did not memorize the rules, they were often punished (Mulroy, 2003). How did such activity relate to student writing? Today, many students enter college without the necessary knowledge to write compositions (Mulroy, 2003; Stott & Chapman, 2001; Bizzell, 1986). Some of these college students will become teachers. In 1994, Madden and Laurence compared writing samples from 1956, 1978, and 1993 for errors in spelling, vocabulary, and grammar to determine if writing competence for

college students had declined during that period. They found that writing skills had declined and wondered if there would be anyone left with enough knowledge of the English language to teach future generations (Madden & Laurence, 1994).

How do teachers' beliefs and perceptions relate to these issues of grammar and writing instruction and students' abilities to use language well? A search for information about English language arts teachers' beliefs and perceptions about grammar produced no research studies specifically relating to English language arts teachers' beliefs and perceptions about grammar except for those studies related to teaching English as a second language that I will discuss in this section. There is research on teacher beliefs in other areas. Gabrielatos (2002) had the following to say about teacher perceptions, "Teachers' perceptions and knowledge of language influence the way they teach" (p. 75). Researchers have made us aware that a teacher must have knowledge of the subject and of the pedagogy that is inherent to the subject in order to teach effectively (Ringstaff & Sandholtz, 2002; Johnston & Goettsch, 2000). How can teachers learn to teach grammar when leading authorities in the field of literacy have so many different philosophies and methods resulting from the shift away from traditional grammar? The teacher brings content knowledge, pedagogical knowledge, and knowledge of learners, beliefs, and perceptions into the classroom. As the teacher designs lessons, he or she uses all background knowledge and beliefs (Johnston & Goettsch, 2000). States and counties mandate curriculum standards, but the teacher is the one who plans lessons to develop that curriculum based on her or his beliefs. For example, in a study of preservice teachers' attitudes toward student writing, Briggs and Paillotet (1997) carefully taught their students positive ways to respond to students' compositions and were surprised at

the negative attitudes contained in the comments preservice teachers made on student writing. They determined that prior knowledge (knowledge gained from their own education) preservice teachers had determined the ways they responded to student work. This study is important when researching teacher attitudes and beliefs about subject matter. Schulz (200l) points out that students' learning may be hindered if the teacher and student do not share the same expectations for classroom instruction. Yang (2000) surveyed Taiwanese preservice elementary teachers regarding their beliefs about teaching English and determined that teachers have well-developed attitudes that they take into the classroom. Yang said that a way to change those beliefs is to move in developmental stages and determined that it is essential to examine teachers' beliefs based on their teaching practices. In a study of teachers of English as second language, Borg (2001) determined that in his two case studies teachers' perceptions of their own knowledge of grammar affected their teaching practices. Another researcher (Fox, 1995) examined the teaching practices of two first-year secondary English teachers and compared their stated teaching beliefs and their classroom activities. One of the two teachers concentrated on literature instruction, which was the focus she identified as being important. The other teacher knew that she did not like traditional teaching of grammar because of her own experiences as a student. She was not sure where her focus would lie, but she was sure it should not be grammar. As she began to teach, she found the demands of teaching difficult to manage and began to rely on the traditional grammar she had said she would not use. This study was investigating teachers' beliefs as they related to their teaching practices, not specifically teachers' beliefs and perceptions about grammar and grammar

instruction. Fox illustrated that the attitudes teachers take into the classroom can affect instruction.

Constance Weaver (1996) gives a list of twelve beliefs that teachers may have for teaching traditional grammar rather than teaching grammar in context:

1. Teachers are unaware of the research.
2. Teachers do not believe the research.
3. Teachers believe grammar is interesting in itself.
4. Teachers "assume that writers and readers need to know about grammar in order to comprehend texts to write effectively" (p. 24).
5. Teachers assume there is a correlation between writing and reading because some good readers are good writers.
6. Teachers teach grammar because it is easier than teaching writing.
7. Teachers believe there is no harm in teaching grammar.
8. Teachers are required to teach grammar by their school system.
9. Teachers "fear that if they don't teach grammar, students might miss out on something" (p. 25).
10. Teachers bow to pressure from others.
11. Teachers believe that the research is valid for some but that others learn better traditionally.
12. Teachers "believe that grammar is valuable when it is applied to writing" (p. 25).

Many teacher beliefs are fully developed before they enter teacher preparation programs (Pajares, 1992). First, teachers are learners in elementary and secondary settings. Second, teachers go into teacher preparatory courses where they may or may not be exposed to alternative teaching methods for grammar and writing. Fang (1996) suggested that the missing paradigm in educational research was research into teacher beliefs. Recent research into teachers' attitudes and beliefs about teaching content area may offer guidelines for research into English language arts teachers' beliefs about grammar and the teaching of grammar. Hall (2005) asked three questions in her research: "(a) What attitudes and beliefs do preservice and inservice middle and high school content area teachers have about teaching reading to their students, (b) How have teacher

educators attempted to work with preservice and inservice middle and high school content area teachers on becoming teachers of reading, and (c) What effects did these attempts have on the teachers involved?" (p. 403). The tentative conclusions found that preservice and inservice teachers show some similarities to the way they teach reading and the beliefs they have about the teaching of reading in content areas. Hall says that the study indicates that teacher beliefs are more influential in teachers' decisions about instruction than their knowledge of content. Ertmer (2005) suggested that pedagogical beliefs of teachers interfere with successful implementation of technology in classrooms. She suggests that in order to change teacher beliefs, research needs to be done in the areas of personal experiences where teachers have first-hand experiences with technology, vicarious experiences where teachers experience usage by observing successful implementation, and social-cultural influences through professional learning communities. A study by Fritz Staub and Elsbeth Stern (2002) found that student achievement in mathematics was related to pedagogical beliefs that teachers held. All of these studies show the importance of teacher beliefs about the subjects they teach.

Professional Development

Are teacher beliefs influenced by professional development courses? Beliefs may shape pedagogical knowledge that is transmitted to students (Staub & Stern, 2002). Teachers may cling to their long-held beliefs and be resistant to change when presented with new teaching ideas that are contrary to their own (Hall, 2005). A research study by Woolley, Woan-Jue, and Woolley (2004) tested an instrument meant to measure changes in teachers' beliefs as teacher candidates progressed through teacher education programs. They found that freshmen in college classrooms were most influenced in their beliefs by

their observations of their teachers, but student teachers and inservice teachers seemed to be guided by what worked best in their own teaching. They felt that participants may have learned their own theoretical bases for their teaching. These researchers did not see significant changes in beliefs over time. Torff, Sessions, and Byrnes (2005) developed an instrument to test teacher beliefs about professional development because they say there is a lack of measurement of beliefs, and teachers' attitudes toward professional development are often negative.

There are numerous models of staff development. Teachers may seek new knowledge on their own through self-development. This type of staff development allows teachers to identify their own needs and seek activities or sources to meet those needs. Another type of staff development may occur through observation by either an administrator or another teacher. The observer offers feedback and suggestions for change. Sometimes teachers are asked to participate in school-wide or system-wide initiatives to change curriculum. In this type of development, teachers help to develop curriculum. The one method that many teachers associate with staff development is training by someone from the outside of the school system whom the administration deems to be an authority. In this model, it is assumed that teachers need to change. This model may or may not be successful depending on several factors that include teacher attitude, trainer's ability, and quality of the program (Sparks & Loucks-Horsley, 1990).

One method of successful professional development involved Professional Development Schools (PDSs) as described by Linda Darling-Hammond (1998). Universities and schools improve their students' learning if they work in partnerships. After the prospective teacher has completed bachelor's level coursework, she or he works

in a mentoring relationship with a senior teacher and university professor. During the year-long internship, the prospective teacher conducts case studies, action research, and research of literature. In a PDS environment, the beginning teacher learns, and the senior teacher deepens knowledge that teaching includes studying, reflecting, and researching.

The National Writing Project Model of Professional Development

In *Inside the National Writing Project*, Ann Lieberman and Diane Wood (2003) identified eight characteristics of some successful learning networks for teachers. These included challenging agendas, indirect learning, collaborative learning environments, integrated work, facilitative leaders, multiple perspectives, context-specific and general values, and movement-like organizational structure. Teachers and students alike enjoy collaborative learning environments where they learn from each other as well as texts. Teachers and students also want to know that what they are learning can be used in settings other than the classroom. The context needs to be genuine. Students and teachers also enjoy a learning environment where the leader of the learning group facilitates, rather than dictates, learning.

A major principle of the National Writing Project is that teachers are the key to educational reform. In separate studies, Lieberman and Wood (2003), Darling-Hammond (1998), and Carl Nagin (*Because Writing Matters*, 2003) all state that teacher knowledge must be valued. Another principle of the NWP is that the best teachers of teachers are teachers. When teachers are allowed to work collaboratively, they learn from each other and share their best ideas for mutual use (Lieberman & Wood, 2003).

The National Writing Project also asserts that language arts and English teachers should not be the only teachers of writing. Teachers in all subjects should teach writing

by incorporating it in their classroom instruction. Many teachers in subject areas, including English language arts, however, do not feel comfortable with teaching writing. They do not write themselves and do not know how it relates to their subjects. Professional development could assist these teachers. As Nagin (2003) suggests, “We cannot build a nation of educated people who can communicate effectively without teachers and administrators who value, understand, and practice writing themselves” (p. 60). The NWP model of teaching writing allows teachers with different backgrounds to share knowledge of teaching techniques and philosophies. The administration of the school should participate in the development of writing across the curriculum. The NWP also states that writing must be taught from kindergarten through university levels (Nagin, 2003). A study by Marshall and Pritchard (2002) indicated that benefits teachers who have attended staff development using the NWP model receive do make a difference in classroom instruction. I experienced the strength of this model while attend a summer workshop in 1991. With this experience in mind, I designed the professional learning course for this study to emphasize the strengths of the NWP model.

Summary

The previously cited research shows that there is a long and controversial history involved in the teaching grammar (Braddock, Lloyd-Jones, & Schoer, 1963; Hartwell, 1985; Hillocks, 1986; Noguchi, 1991; Weaver, 1996; Schuster, 2003). It also shows that teacher beliefs are important to student learning (Pajares, 1992; Fang, 1996; Ertmer, 2005; Hall, 2005; Torff, Sessions, & Byrnes, 2005). Professional development courses may have some effect on teacher beliefs (Darling-Hammond, 1998; Nagin, 2003). For these reasons, the current research was undertaken.

The current study invited teachers to reflect on their beliefs and perceptions about grammar and their teaching of grammar. The National Writing Project model served as a model for the professional development course in this study where teachers explored ways to incorporate the teaching of grammar into the teaching of writing. Since the research in this review of literature has indicated that beliefs and perceptions of teachers are important to their teaching practices and there are no specific investigations into English language arts teachers' beliefs and perceptions about grammar and the teaching of grammar, this study will help to fill an important gap in the literature.

In summary, Chapter One has provided a discussion of the problem, the purpose of the study, the guiding questions, and theoretical framework. Chapter Two provided more detailed information on the controversy over grammar instruction by reviewing the literature related to the history of grammar instruction, the importance of teacher beliefs in grammar instruction, and the connection between teacher beliefs and professional development. In Chapter Three that follows, I provide an overview of the research design and methodology that were used in this study.

CHAPTER THREE

METHODOLOGY

Studying Teacher Beliefs through Qualitative Inquiry

Although quantitative research is very effective for many studies, social science researchers interested in knowing such phenomena as why an event occurred, the underlying perspectives held by the participants, or how setting affects behavior, frequently choose qualitative research methods (Bogdan & Biklin, 2003). The researcher's beliefs and perceptions about a phenomenon lead to selection of a topic and theoretical lens. The theoretical lens through which a researcher views a particular issue or problem for study determines the choice of methodology. Quantitative methods cannot give the depth of information about participants' beliefs and perceptions, as can qualitative methods. A qualitative researcher interprets and describes data that is collected through such methods as interviews and observations. He or she selects questions to guide research, rather than testing hypotheses. The qualitative researcher inductively analyzes all data to find recurring themes that guide further data collection, and no data is unworthy of examination. A qualitative researcher is interested in process instead of only product. Context and participant beliefs about phenomena are important to qualitative researchers. Consequently, the researcher works with and observes participants in their natural settings (Bogdan & Biklin, 2003; Merriam & Assoc., 2002). Since the intent of this qualitative research is to understand the beliefs of English

language arts teachers about grammar and the teaching of grammar, qualitative inquiry is essential as a methodological framework. Quantitative research is too restrictive for collection and analysis of data concerning beliefs and practices. Thus, qualitative methodology is the best fit for this study.

The purpose of this qualitative, interpretive research was to investigate middle school language arts teachers' beliefs and practices related to grammar and the teaching of grammar. Social constructivism (Fosnot & Perry, 2005) and phenomenology (Schutz, 1967; Seidman, 1998) served as theoretical frameworks for the study.

Four research questions guided the study:

1. What are teachers' definitions of "grammar" as related to the teaching of English language arts?
2. What are teachers' beliefs about grammar and the teaching of grammar in English language arts?
3. What are teachers' reported sources of knowledge for grammar and the teaching of grammar in English language arts?
4. How does a professional learning course on grammar instruction techniques influence teachers' beliefs about grammar and the teaching of grammar?

Participants in the study were teachers who voluntarily enrolled in a five-week professional development course related to the teaching of grammar in English language arts classrooms. Data collection and analysis began in February 2006 and continued through August 2006, while more intensive data analysis and writing took place during fall 2006. Data sources included an open-ended questionnaire; three in-depth,

phenomenological interviews with each teacher (Seidman, 1998) before, during, and after the professional development course; teacher artifacts; reflective email journals; field notes and selected transcriptions of videotaped course sessions; and a researcher's log. I analyzed data using the constant comparative method (Glaser & Strauss, 1967), and richly descriptive participant portraits (Merriam & Assoc., 2002) report the findings. Trustworthiness and rigor were established through adherence to guidelines for establishing credibility, confirmability, dependability, and transferability (Lincoln & Guba, 1985).

The Role of the Researcher

Since the context for this study was a professional development course for English language arts teachers who teach middle school in Middlefield County, a suburb of a large metropolitan area (all names for places and people used in this study are pseudonyms), and since I served as the instructor for that course, my role as researcher must be explored thoroughly. My role was participant/observer as defined by Bogdan and Biklin (2003). Bogdan and Biklin (2003) describe several roles a researcher may play in a research setting. First, the researcher may be a complete observer who does not participate in any activities. Second, the researcher may participate in the setting to the extent that his or her role is indistinguishable from the observed participants. Participant/observers' roles fall somewhere between these two extremes. The particulars of the study determined the amount of participation and observation. My role was as an eighth-grade teacher, a member of the English language arts teaching community. Being a member, I did not have to wait for acceptance into the group. I have participated in workshops at Archer Middle School and other schools throughout the participants'

county. I quickly established rapport with the members of the professional learning community we established during the professional development course on teaching grammar in the context of writing. Teachers may be more willing to talk with each other, as peers, about curriculum matters that concern them than they are to talk with administrators or people who do not have a stake in the field. The teachers talked freely and openly with me about their beliefs and teaching practices.

In terms of my role, I was the facilitator of the class, the instructor at times, and a participant. I selected and provided texts for the class that describe practices in the teaching of grammar that are current with research in the field. I purchased these texts for the members of the study because I wanted the participants to enjoy the course without monetary requirements. In working with these participants, I clearly defined my role at the start of the professional learning course. Participants knew that I intended to interview them for their thoughts on grammar and the teaching of it, as well as administer an open-ended questionnaire requesting their thoughts on teaching grammar. They were eager to share their thoughts with me.

Following the National Writing Project model of professional development as discussed in Chapter Two, participants took an active role as co-teachers of the course. This allowed me, as the researcher, to have more opportunities for note-taking and observation. The high engagement and activity level of the class as well as individual involvement of participants in the teaching of the class minimized the teacher participants' perception of my role as a researcher. All of the participants saw me as a peer, as well as a researcher, because I am also currently an eighth-grade language arts teacher at Archer Middle School.

Time Frame for the Study

The time frame for the data collection for this study was a period of six months, beginning in late February and ending in July, 2006. Follow-up intensive data analysis and writing continued through fall 2006 (For a complete timeline for the study, see Table 2).

Table 1

Timeline for the Study

	June/ July	Nov.	Dec.	Jan.	Feb.	Mar.	Apr.	May	June	July	Aug.	Sept.	Oct.
Develop and Pilot Open-ended Questionnaire	X												
Arrange County Approval Professional Development Course and Research		X	X	X									
Initial Participant Interview					X	X							
Data Collection					X	X	X	X	X	X			
Professional Development Course						X							
Second Interviews						X	X						
Participant Reflections Via Weekly Email							X	X					
Third Interviews								X	X				
Data Analysis and Member Checking					X	X	X	X	X	X			
More Intensive Data Analysis and Writing											X		
Completion of Penultimate Draft and Defense of Dissertation												X	

The open-ended questionnaire used in this study was developed originally in collaboration with Dr. Dana L. Fox for use in the TEEMS English education program, an

alternative M.Ed. degree program at Georgia State University that leads to initial teacher certification in secondary English language arts, grades 6-12, and was piloted during the summer of 2005. I began preliminary planning for the professional learning course on teaching grammar in the context of writing and obtained county approval for the research study and the staff development course during the months of November 2005 through January 2006. The first phase of the study included in-depth preliminary interviews of the participants about their histories with grammar. I used "in-depth, phenomenological interviewing," as described by Seidman (1991). Seidman advocates the use of interviewing as a way of allowing participants in a study to give their own thoughts on a phenomenon. The researcher is encouraged to use the words, whenever possible, of the participants when describing the phenomenon. The phenomenological interviewing approach to research includes three in-depth interviews with participants.

Topics or foci for the three in-depth interviews for this study, along with the interview questions for each of the three interviews, may be found in Appendix A. Interview one in this investigation is a focused life history that asked the interviewee to reflect on life experiences in the context of the topic, or, in this case, the participant's history as a learner of grammar. This interview provided information about how teachers defined grammar, as learners what their reported sources of knowledge about grammar were, and their beliefs about grammar. The second interview asked the participant to focus on concrete details of present experiences with grammar and the teaching of grammar. The second interview also provided data about teachers' beliefs about the teaching of grammar and their resources for the teaching of grammar. The third interview asked participants to reflect on the meaning of their experiences with grammar

and the teaching of grammar. In this investigation, the third interview also asked participants to reflect on the influences of the professional development course on their knowledge of grammar and the teaching of grammar (Seidman, 1991).

Phase two of the study was a five-week professional development course that I designed, facilitated, and initially acted as the primary teacher. The group met one day per week in two-hour sessions, for a total of five classes and a total of ten hours of class instruction and reflection. The five-week time frame was chosen because ten contact hours are required for one staff development unit in the county school system. A two-hour session once a week allowed teachers time to discuss and reflect on the texts they read, lessons they prepared and presented to the class, and grammar lessons taught in their own classrooms. I chose a five-week course in lieu of a ten-week session, which would have allowed more time to develop the ideas, but busy teachers are more likely to attend five sessions than ten sessions. At the end of the course, several of the teachers said that they would have preferred a longer course. During the five weeks, I asked each of the teachers to participant in an interview session at their individual schools, after school, on a day during the week other than the day our class met. Due to scheduling conflicts, it was necessary to conduct some of the interviews after the course had ended, during the month of April. This second interview focused on the beliefs each participant had of her or his teaching of grammar and current experiences inside and outside the classroom.

After the five-week class, when the teachers returned to their classrooms, I emailed each of the participants and asked of their experiences with grammar in their classrooms during April and May. Many of the participants did not respond, but I did

receive five responses. Only two of the responses indicated the teaching of grammar during April and May. The responses I received indicated that the teachers focused on CRCT test preparation and writing during the last two months of the school year. Interestingly, the teachers did not indicate they had taught grammar in the context of writing even though they were teaching writing. I conducted the third interview during post-planning in late May and early June. This interview focused on participants' beliefs and reflections, after some time had passed, on the professional development course and on their own experiences with grammar and the teaching of grammar.

The Setting for the Study

The primary site for this study (where the professional development course took place) was a suburban middle school, Archer Middle School, within a large metropolitan area in the Southeastern United States. Middlefield School District, where the teachers who participated in this study currently teach, consists of 36 schools: 11 elementary schools, composed of kindergarten through sixth grade; 6 elementary schools composed of kindergarten through fifth grade; 3 elementary schools composed of kindergarten through fourth grade; 1 intermediate school, composed of grades five and six; 4 middle schools, composed of grades seven and eight; 2 middle schools, composed of grades six through eight; 4 high schools, composed of grades nine through twelve; 1 high school with ninth grade only; a head start center; an alternative middle/high school; an evening high school; and a school for emotional special needs students. Middlefield School District is a rapidly growing suburban community. Each school year there are typically more than 1000 new students in the district. The county finds it difficult to keep up with demands for schools and has many new schools in the planning stages for completion

over the next several years. Schools in this county vary greatly in student populations. The southern end of the county has a suburban metropolitan character, and the northern end of the county remains largely rural. Some of the schools have students from high socioeconomic backgrounds, and some of the schools have a large of number of students from lower socioeconomic backgrounds. Diversity of student population also varies from school to school. With only a few exceptions, the schools do well on standardized tests. The school board and superintendent are forward-thinkers, and the tax base allows the entire county to have many modern technologies. Each school in the district has a distinct personality. The older schools typically house students from lower, middle and high socioeconomic backgrounds and usually have the highest levels of diversity. This aspect is not due to discrimination, but because of housing and property taxes. As new homes are constructed, the developers give land for future schools in the area; consequently, the new schools are built near the newer, larger homes. The school board rezones each time a school is built and tries to create diversity within the new school. The new schools are typically equipped with the latest technology but do not have as many books in their media centers. The county constantly works to update technologies in the older schools. Many of the schools have mobile classrooms, and the new schools often end up with mobile units after being open only one year.

The first portion of the study, prior to the professional development course, was as set of interviews that took place in the schools where the participants teach. These individual settings allowed the participants an important zone of comfort. The professional development course, or the second phase of the study, took place at Archer Middle School. We held the first two classes in the media center and the last three in the

art room. The library had tables that allowed participants to discuss ideas about grammar while facing each other. We moved to the art room because it had tables, the space was larger, and there was a white board to use for lessons. Both spaces allowed for more freedom of movement than a classroom setting with desks.

I chose Archer Middle School as the setting of the professional development course because it is a convenient location for teachers in the school district to meet, and the principal gave permission for the study to take place in the location. The participants included six teachers from three of the older middle schools in the district. The county offered the professional development course to all middle and high school English or language arts teachers in the county, grades 6-12. I invited a total of eighty-one high school teachers and forty-seven middle school teachers, but only six chose to participate. Three of the six middle schools were built in the early1980s, one of the middle schools was built in the 1990s, and the remaining two were opened in 2004 and 2005. One of the older middle schools and one of the high schools are located in the central part of the county and have students from older, well established, affluent areas of the county, as well as newer high-priced homes. These two schools typically score high on standardized tests. They are, however, in transition, because a new state-of-the-art high school and middle school have opened in the last year, and students are being redistricted. These new schools have students from high socioeconomic areas, as well as some of the older rural areas. One of the older middle schools and the one built in the 1990s, as well as two high schools built at the same time as the middle schools, are located in the southern end of the county. They have students with a mixture of socioeconomic levels and diversity, drawing students from recent upper middle class developments and older,

transitional, less affluent areas of the county. Archer Middle School has the lowest socioeconomic configuration in the county. It also has the highest percentage of English as second language learners of any of the middle schools in the county, though still low for the surrounding metropolitan area. Two of the participants in the study came from Archer Middle School, one came from Bender Middle School, and three came from Corner Middle School.

Design of the Study

A Phenomenological Approach

The phenomenological approach is a lens for viewing data, but it is also an approach to data collection and analysis. The phenomenological approach is rooted in the philosophy of a 19th century German mathematician named Husserl. The philosophy turned away from the scientific principles of the 19th century that measured outcomes and maintained that a phenomenon has meaning in itself. The phenomenon, which may be thought, object, or concept, is best examined from the individual perspective of the person experiencing it. Thus, a phenomenon can have multiple meanings based on setting and participants (Ehrich, 1996). The phenomenological approach seeks to study and understand the way a person, setting, and phenomenon are interrelated. This approach maintains that everyday activities in the lives of participants are worthy of study and that we gain insight into the phenomenon by eliciting those beliefs. One way of finding what people think is to ask them; consequently, many phenomenologists use in-depth interviews to gain data (Merriam & Assoc., 2002). This study addressed two phenomena: the phenomenon of grammar and the teaching of grammar as perceived by English language arts teachers and the phenomenon of participation in a professional

learning course. Since English language arts teachers experience the phenomenon of grammar on a regular basis, their beliefs and perceptions about grammar influence future generations, and knowing their beliefs will shed light on its place in curriculum development. Teachers participate in various means of professional development. The NWP model of professional development helps to facilitate the creation of a professional learning community that may affect the ways teaching participants enact curriculum as they return to their classrooms. A study of teacher- perceived effects of the course adds to understanding the participants' experiences with grammar and their beliefs about grammar.

Participants and the Professional Development Course

This investigation used purposive sampling (Merriam & Assoc., 2002) because the participants were those English language arts teachers who chose to participate in the study. In purposive sampling, the researcher chooses participants based on criteria that meet the purpose of the research. I interviewed the teachers who volunteered for the professional development course because these English language arts teachers had a high level of interest in grammar. It is important to choose participants who can best represent the phenomenon that the researcher is studying (Merriam & Assoc., 2002). Obtaining a random sample for this study would not have been feasible because the questions relate specifically to English language arts teachers, nor is that sampling method appropriate for qualitative research.

The county offered the professional development course to all English language arts teachers in grades six through twelve in Middlefield County, a suburb of a large Southern metropolitan area. Participants in this study were English language arts

teachers who chose to attend the course. In order to get participation, I visited each of the middle and high schools and talked about the course with the English language arts teachers during their monthly department meetings. I also gave them flyers outlining the professional learning course and my proposed research. The teachers who participated in this study live in the county and surrounding counties and teach at several different schools. Teachers in Middlefield School District vary in backgrounds, similar to the students. Some of the teachers are from rural areas of the county and have lived there all of their lives, and some of the teachers live in suburban areas and have lived in those settings all of their lives.

The county offered the professional learning course to all English language arts teachers in the county who teach grades six through twelve. The teachers who decided to enroll were six European American middle school teachers who were interested in teaching grammar and writing. Since all participants were middle school teachers, the professional learning course was successful in that they were able to share ideas that did not need to be changed to reflect varying age groups. Demographic information about the participants in this study is included in Table 1. Following Table 1 are individual profiles of the participating teachers. The teachers in the study chose their own pseudonyms that are included in the table and throughout the paper. Two of the participants chose surnames as well as first names. Sources of direct quotations are referenced in the following manner: “I-1” refers to Interview 1; I-2 refers to Interview 2, I-3 refers to Interview 3, and “C-1” refers to Card 1 or the index card containing the participant’s definition of grammar from the first night of the professional learning course. Page numbers from data transcripts are also provided.

Table 2

Demographics of Participants

Name	Sex	Age	# Years	Subject(s) and Grade Level Taught	Highest Degree Held
Melinda	F	49	1st year	8th grade language arts	B.S. in Accountancy B.S. in Middle Grades Education (Math and English)
Emily	F	54	9	8th grade language arts	B.S. in Middle Grades Education
Molly Floyd	F	39	5	8th grade language arts	B.S. English Education
Violet	F	31	5	8th grade language arts	B.S. in Middle Grades Education (language arts and science) M.S. in Adolescent English Education
Mark Tweed	M	31	1st year	8th grade special education (language arts and reading)	B.A. in English Literature; Currently pursuing M.S. in English Education
Jennifer	F	24	2	7th grade language arts	B.S. in Secondary English; Currently pursuing M.S. in English Education

In the following paragraphs, each participant is introduced through a short profile. The teachers chose their own pseudonyms in this study.

Melinda

Melinda's original undergraduate degree was in accountancy and her first profession was as a controller. She stopped working formally outside the home in 1977 when her son was having difficulties in school. As she watched her son struggle and felt that some of his teachers were not compassionate, she decided to go into education: "The reason I went into teaching was to find those children who were struggling who wanted

to work."(I-3, p. 6). She was surprised when she found struggling middle school students who did not willingly accept the help she offered: "See, I was thinking when I went into teaching, everyone would want to learn if you gave them opportunities to do that. But there are students who, I mean, that I can't seem to connect with. It's more than I'd like to see." (I-3, p. 6). Melinda is compassionate toward her students and does not want to see them fail. She frequently stays late at school to offer help, and she also provides additional help during a short study period that students have each day.

Melinda is a first-year teacher; however, her first career in the area of accounting has given her valuable insights into what students may face when they exit school. For her second undergraduate degree, she majored in middle grades education with concentrations in math and English. She thought she would teach math because of her background and was surprised when she was offered a position as an eighth-grade language arts teacher: "I knew I would have to teach them how to write and felt I would also have to teach them grammar because I felt that they needed to effectively communicate." (I-1, p. 4). She describes her mentor teacher as being very traditional. Since Melinda is a first-year teacher, she tries to do things like her mentor and is hesitant about deviating too much from the teachers around her. Sometimes she feels an internal conflict because she does not always believe that the ways her mentor teacher teaches are the best methods. She has diagrammed sentences with her students this year because her mentor teacher firmly believes in diagramming; however, she is not sure that her students are learning anything useful from the diagramming. Melinda was not going to take the course in teaching grammar in the context of writing, but two co-workers, Molly and Violet, who were also participants in the course, convinced her. She said she was looking

for alternative methods of teaching grammar because, “I don’t think students remember it traditionally” (I-3, p. 9) and “As a new educator, learning new strategies to teach grammar and writing is high on my priority list” (C-1).

Emily

Emily chose to postpone college to be a stay-at-home mother when her children were small: “I stopped for about ten years to raise my family” (I-1, p. 3). After ten years, she started taking one or two classes per year and said that it took her twenty-six years to get her undergraduate degree in middle grades education. She felt that she knew grammar well because of her parents: “My mother was always correcting me as early as three or four” (I-1, p. 1); “[I learned grammar] from my parents, number one, listening to them and just feeling the correct way to say things because my parents always talked correctly” (I-1, p. 1). She said that she would, “write the way I would speak,” (I-1, p. 5), and received good grades in high school. Because she felt that she knew grammar well, she was surprised when she failed the Regents Exam in college the first time due to pronoun/antecedent errors. She asked herself, “How in the world could this not be right because it sounded right…? I think that was probably the turning point for me as far as understanding the uses of grammar and how to use them in my writing” (I-1, p. 5). After failing the Regent’s Exam, she took a class in grammar that was taught traditionally. She said, “I remember thinking that there was a lot more to grammar than I thought” (I-1, p. 3). Now, she feels very confident in her knowledge of traditional grammar and says that, “I can see it more in my mind as I speak it, as well as when I write it and teach it. And that’s sort of interesting to me because it never was like that before” (I-2, p. 1).

Emily has taught seventh and eighth-grade language arts for nine years. She calls herself a traditional language arts teacher and uses many traditional methods, such as textbook exercises and worksheets, in her classroom. She is very comfortable with grammar, "What makes grammar easier for me? It's sort of like breathing. I know how to speak, and I know how to write, for the most part…. I've never thought of it as being easy or hard. I just think of it as language" (I-2, p. 7). She says that she follows along with other language arts teachers with whom she works: "I think that had I not been following along with some of these other teachers and trying to keep up with them, I probably would have developed my own program by now" (I-2, p. 5). When the state adopted new standards for eighth-grade language arts, she started looking for additional teaching methods because the new standards focus more on writing. She took a class on writer's workshop last summer, learned about Nancie Atwell's (2002) methods, and unsuccessfully tried it in her classroom this year. She said she would like to learn more: "I think I just want to know if I can do it better. Is there a better way for me to teach these students grammar and how to write? So, I guess that's just a matter of, can I do better?" (I-3, p. 7). The things that are most important to her as a teacher are, first, her students and, second, the appreciation of her administrators and students. She also said that her students' progress is very important: "First and foremost, that progress in students because I'm here to see them progress" (I-3, p. 9).

Molly

Molly has a B.S. in English Education and has been teaching for five years; all have been at her current middle school. She taught seventh-grade language arts for two years and then began teaching eighth-grade language arts. She enjoys reading and

writing but says that grammar is an acquired taste: "Reading and writing are really what motivated me to become a teacher, and the teaching of grammar was never something I was excited about or really looked forward to" (I-3, p. 1). She says that her mother taught her to read and that, "I think I just learned to read holistically from my parents" (I-1, p. 1). She believes that speaking grammatically correctly is a result of her home environment because her mother was an English teacher and used correct grammar. She is more interested in writing than grammar and says, "I don't really think too much about grammar other than in the context of teaching it" (I-2, p. 1). She had negative experiences in seventh grade with grammar because it was what she called skill and drill.

Molly's interest in writing began in third grade when she had a, "great writing teacher" (I-1, p. 4). She writes in her free time and sees grammar as a tool for her writing. She says that she enjoys listening to the vernacular of people and tries to use what she hears in her own writing. She thinks it would be fun to try to use that in her teaching of writing and grammar. She participated in one of the National Writing Project summer institutes, and now she centers her classroom activities around writing. I have had the opportunity to visit with Molly in her classroom. When you walk in, you will see students engaged in various aspects of writing. Some of them will be drafting by hand or on the computer, some of them will be peer conferencing in pairs or groups, and some of them may be conferencing with her.

Molly decided to participate in the Teaching Grammar in the Context of Writing course because she was looking for alternative methods of teaching grammar. She said of traditional teaching methods, "I think it's the wrong way to teach them, just to give them traditional things" (I-3, p. 5). She wants her students to learn to write well. When

asked what was important to her as a teacher, she said this of her students: "Getting a sense of who your students are through their voices as they write. Learning who they are. Giving them a sense, and I think I have been able to do this to some extent, giving them a sense that they can be empowered by language and writing" (I-1, p. 4).

Violet

Violet's educational background was slightly different from the other participants in this study in that she grew up in England. She said that she never studied formal grammar in school until she began college, "I didn't go to grammar school, which means I didn't get taught grammar" (I-3, p. 3). She thinks grammar is confusing, "The more I learn about grammar, the more I know I have been doing it wrong, whether it be as a teacher or as a learner because grammar is supposed to be about writing well, speaking well, and making sense of the world around you" (I-3, p. 1). She also believes that too much focus is placed on grammar in elementary and middle schools, "I think they [the students] come knowing so much more than we give them credit for, and I also think there is so much we don't need to tell them" (I-3, p. 2).

From her own experiences in her master's program, Violet believes that professors are beginning to introduce different methods of teaching grammar but are not providing enough information, "I think universities are doing a great job telling us there's another way to do things, but I'm not sure even they are aware…. I'm still not sure they're telling us *how* to do it" (I-2, p. 6). Her professors taught her that she should teach students how to write, so her primary focus in her language arts classroom is writing. When she entered her education program, she believed that she would teach life science

and was surprised to be offered a language arts position; however, she now loves teaching language arts and does not want to change subjects.

Violet decided to take the course, “Teaching Grammar in the Context of Writing,” because she loves teaching writing. She also believes she should teach grammar because of standardized tests and state standards but that grammar should be taught in the context of writing rather than in isolated lessons, “Actually, grammar, for me, is about proofreading, and I’m thrilled that the CRCT, the new questions on the CRCT are backing up what I have thought” (I-2, p. 1). She enjoyed sharing ideas with other members of the learning community and was excited to find other teachers who are willing to try new methods of teaching grammar and writing.

Mark

Mark is in his first year of teaching. He currently teaches special education classes in language arts and reading. He began his master’s program in English Education in the summer of 2006. His undergraduate degree is in English Literature, and many of his responses to questions and discussion during class sessions reflect his love of literature. He also enjoys classical rhetoric, and that, too, is often apparent in his responses. He worked in the software industry for several years before deciding to go into teaching and has knowledge of new techniques and products that might be unfamiliar to less-technology savvy teachers. He and his wife have both recently pursued education degrees, and he enjoys working with his stepsons on the things they bring home from school.

Mark’s parents are both educators, and he believes they influenced his use of grammar because, “They both practiced Standard English in the household” (I-1, p. 4).

He remembers traditional grammar instruction in middle school and writing papers in high school: "The main focus that I remember was we would get a paper back. There would be errors we would have to go over, find out how to fix the errors, fix the errors, and turn them back in" (I-1, p. 2). He does not remember having any significant problems in college, "I really wasn't thinking about grammar too much, and I didn't get many marks in terms of grammar. So I thought at that point it had become second nature" (I-1, p. 7).

Mark spent his student teaching experiences and his first year observing the methods other teachers employ in their classrooms in order to develop his own teaching skills: "My thinking is that a teacher is always a student. If I cease to be a student, I'm really doing a disservice to my students" (I-3, p. 9). He enjoys studying classical rhetoric and believes that teaching students to use rhetoric in writing would improve their writing. He also enjoys using literature such as *Tom Sawyer* to demonstrate various aspects of grammatical construction. He has discovered many resources that he has found helpful. He talked specifically about ideas he found in *Hot Fudge Monday* for teaching prepositions, "I kind of took this exercise out of *Hot Fudge Monday*. It's a conversation between two cave people…" (I-2, p. 2). This constant search for new ideas brought Mark to the professional learning course.

Jennifer

Jennifer began her experiences with grammar when her parents read to her as a child. Her parents made a videotape of her and her dad "reading" (I-1, p. 1). She says that her early family connection to literacy "sparked my interest, my primary interest, in writing and reading, and, therefore, the grammar sort of fell into place" (I-1, p. 1). Her

mother continued to influence her by correcting her grammar until, “I would pick the correct form – I guess the grammatical form” (I-1, p. 1), and also by reading her writing through high school and on into college. She believes that she didn’t learn grammar when she studied grammar in middle school through traditional worksheets and textbooks. It wasn’t until she learned how to apply it in high school that she felt she knew grammar. In high school, she had an English instructor who made the students correct their papers until they were grammatically correct: “It helped me because I knew that I was able to do this. This was something that I was good at, but it took a lot of work” (I-1, p. 4). In college, during her undergraduate courses in English and education, her instructors introduced her to Nancie Atwell and Harry Noden, and she discovered that there are other methods of teaching grammar.

Jennifer is twenty-four years old and in her second year of teaching seventh-grade language arts. Currently, she is enrolled in a master’s degree program at a local university. She was fortunate during her first year of teaching to have a mentor teacher who uses the writer’s workshop approach to teaching language arts, “Meredith has really been influential…. She really helped me my first year” (I-2, p. 8). Her mentor teacher teaches very little grammar, but Jennifer is sometimes uncomfortable with other language arts teachers in her school because they teach traditional grammar, and she prefers to teach through projects. She took the “Teaching Grammar in the Context of Writing” professional learning course because the title was similar to a class she had in college. She said the undergraduate class in college did not offer her insight into teaching grammar, and she hoped this course would be more beneficial. She believes that using the grammar of Standard American English is powerful and that she needs to incorporate

it in her teaching of writing. She is seeking methods that will enable her to teach grammar and writing together, "I knew that I was going to get something great out of this class" (I-3, p. 10).

Data Collection and Analysis

Data sources included an open-ended questionnaire; three in-depth, phenomenological interviews with each teacher before, during, and after the professional learning course; teachers' artifacts and journals; field notes and field notes from videotaped and audiotaped course sessions; and a researcher log. The first set of data, the interviews, enabled me to investigate my first question that addresses the attitudes and beliefs of teachers who teach grammar (see Appendix A). This allowed participants to think about their history with grammar and writing and to reflect on their definitions of grammar. The second set of data was the open-ended questionnaire that the teacher/participants completed during the study (see Appendix B). The open-ended questions on this instrument were designed as an additional tool for me, the researcher to understand the ways in which the participants learned grammar. Further, the questionnaire offered me insight into my third question in which I investigated their knowledge about grammar and their teaching of grammar. A question, for example, was, "How did you learn about 'grammar'? Where (e.g., school, home, etc.)? At what age(s)? In elementary, middle school, high school, and/or college? And from whom did you learn about 'grammar' (e.g., parents, grandparents, or caregivers? teachers, administrators, or professors? church leaders? other relatives or community members)? Any positive or negative memories of learning 'grammar' stand out?" The questionnaire and interviews also provided insight into my second question in which I attempted to

understand the beliefs teachers have about how grammar should be taught. The participants also wrote their definitions of grammar on index cards at the beginning of the professional learning course and at the end. The third set of data included field notes taken during the professional learning classes and selective transcriptions/field notes from the videotapes and audiotapes of these class sessions. As the course progressed, teachers used the knowledge they gained in class and discussed various methods of teaching grammar concepts in the context of writing. Their discussions in groups illuminated their thought processes about teaching grammar in the context of writing and provided data about their beliefs about grammar and the teaching of grammar. The field notes and selected transcriptions from the course also provided information for the fourth question about the effects of a professional learning course on grammar on the beliefs of teachers. The fourth set of data included email journals shared by participants after the professional development course, as well as any teaching artifacts the participants shared, including lesson plans. The third interview, the emails, and the field notes from the course served to answer guiding question number four about the influence of the professional development course on the participants' beliefs about grammar and the teaching of grammar.

As discussed above, multiple sources of data guided the collection and analysis of data. Research questions guided the analysis, and all data were coded using the constant comparative method of analysis in which data are continuously analyzed and compared across data sources as they are being collected. Themes emerged and were compared to existing themes, but were not tested. As categories were analyzed, they were integrated and delimited as themes solidified (Glaser & Strauss, 1967). First, I analyzed data from

initial interviews. Properties or themes began to emerge. By constantly comparing the properties, I began to see that they were related in many different ways as a unified whole, or integrated. Delimiting is the solidification and reduction of theories. As I analyzed data, I was able to connect themes in such a way as to solidify themes and reduce to smaller groups or concepts. Reduction is the formulation of a "smaller set of higher level concepts" (p. 110). By reducing and solidifying the concepts, I also was able to reduce the terminology used to describe the data. When the terminology is reduced, it becomes more generalizable (Glaser & Strauss, 1967). As I collected data from the interviews, field notes, the questionnaire, and journals, I developed codes for themes as they emerged. I kept all individual participant data in a notebook with sections for each participant and divisions for each of the interviews, the questionnaire, and the index cards. I created a separate notebook that contained background information, permission forms, and field notes from transcriptions. Each time I collected data, I coded for emerging themes. First, I read each transcription thoroughly. I used color-coding to indicate information associated with each of the research questions as I read. After I had read through and color-coded for links to questions, I went back through, reading for themes within questions and used number coding to delineate the themes. Sometimes the participants' words fit into multiple questions. I read those sections several times to determine the question and theme most accurately represented. I designated the question and theme by notation on the side of the transcription. In terms of my chronology of analysis of data, I began by coding the first interviews. I followed that with the second interview by coding and cross checking. I selectively transcribed audio and videotape sessions, taking field notes from the parts that I did not transcribe, of the professional

development course by focusing on those sections that seemed most pertinent to my questions. I coded the transcriptions and field notes for questions and themes. I also watched the videotapes for visual clues that showed beliefs and perceptions of teachers. I then offered the transcriptions to the participants for verification of validity of information. I continued coding and cross checking with the second interviews, journals, and third interviews. The themes discussed in the results section emerged throughout the coding process and were finalized during drafting and writing.

I also used the processes of phenomenological reduction, horizontalization, and imaginative variation to analyze data. Merriam and Assoc. (2002) describe the terms used in phenomenological research: "Phenomenological reduction is the process of continually returning to the essence of the experience to derive the inner structure or meaning in and of itself" (p. 94). This is similar to reduction in the constant comparative method in that it continually reviews the data in order to find recurring themes. Horizontalization is the process of explaining the meaning of a phenomenon by recognizing and describing themes in all of the equally weighted data. Imaginative variation is examining the data from various perspectives and frames of reference (Merriam & Assoc., 2002). Phenomenological interviewing allowed me to get more in-depth responses than surveys and observations. Each time I coded, I used this method of data analysis to narrow the focus of the responses by seeing similarities. Also, as I analyzed interviews, I added questions to allow for other frames of reference in the data.

I used the constant comparative and phenomenological methods of analysis concurrently. Analysis was as accurate as possible. Since I have control of the language in my research, I shared my initial descriptions and preliminary interpretations with the

participants as a form of member checking in order to establish a verification of accuracy of my representations of their words and actions. I gave the participants copies of their individual profiles and copies of Chapter Four and Chapter Five and allowed them to edit and elaborate on their original responses as they saw fit. I then changed the wording of their quotations based on their editing.

Establishing Rigor in Qualitative Research

Rigor for this study was established through triangulation of data, member checking, and thorough description of all aspects of data collection and analysis. Triangulation of data was the comparison of data collected from all multiple sources. The interviews, index cards, open-ended questionnaire, field notes, audio tapes, and videotapes provided data. Researchers in the social sciences use triangulation of data because multiple sources of information give a fuller understanding of the meaning of a phenomenon (Bogdan & Biklin, 2003).

Triangulation of data

Two methods accomplished triangulation of data in this study. First, I used Seidman's (1998) in-depth phenomenological interviews. This provided three sets of interview data in that one interview built upon the next. Second, in addition to the interviews, I also utilized an open-ended questionnaire that the participants completed. Third, I took transcriptions and field notes from videotaped classes, as well as my field notes from classes. When I could not take notes during class, I wrote notes or memos to myself immediately after each class session. All data from these various sources were compared continually during the process of analysis.

Member checking

I established credibility and confirmability through member checking. I gave the participants my transcriptions of their interviews to check. The participants also met with me for formal member checking of Chapter Four and their individual profiles. At their suggestion, I emailed all participants Chapter four, Chapter five, and their profiles in order for them to make any changes they wanted to make to their words. All changes are included in the final document. This process of member checking ensured an accurate portrayal of their beliefs and perceptions. I also offered to allow the participants to read the final product, if they desired, before I completed writing and sharing the research with others.

Validity or trustworthiness of data

Since the participants gave their beliefs about the phenomena, what they say is valid to the question, "What are teacher beliefs and perceptions about grammar and the teaching of grammar?" The three-interview method of data collection allowed comparisons for themes. Multiple participants gave answers to the same questions and further added to the trustworthiness of the data. In this section of the dissertation, I have attempted to describe in detail my process for data collection and analysis. I have also utilized the voices of participants in Chapters four and five, quoting verbatim from their responses in interviews and the questionnaire as well as describing their comments and lessons developed in the professional learning course. This thick description was included to contribute to the credibility and trustworthiness of my study.

CHAPTER FOUR

TEACHERS' DEFINITIONS, BELIEFS, AND REPORTED SOURCES

This chapter relates findings for the first three research questions. I will discuss the fourth research question in a later chapter. The term “grammar” has multiple meanings; however, for this study, when I use the term, I use it generically in that the term takes its meaning from the perspectives of the individual participants. This chapter is organized according to the areas of focus for the first three questions: (1) teachers’ definitions of “grammar.” (2) teachers’ beliefs about “grammar” and “grammar instruction,” and (3) teachers’ reported sources of knowledge for grammar and the teaching of grammar.

Teachers’ Definitions of Grammar

As my review of the history and scholarship on grammar instruction has shown, many varying definitions of grammar exist in the field of English language arts education. Hartwell (1985) discussed five meanings of “grammar,” some of which were clarifications of the work of W. Nelson Francis. Grammar 1 is the grammar in our heads. Grammar 2 is the linguistic branch that studies formal language patterns. Grammar 3 is “linguistic etiquette,” but Hartwell defines it as usage, “Grammar 3 is, of course, not grammar at all, but usage” (p. 110). Grammar 4 is the grammar used in schools. Grammar 5 is the stylized grammar used in writing. The participants in the current study defined grammar in terms of rules, but they sometimes blurred the distinction between rules and usage. The rules they are referring to are those found in school grammar, or

Hartwell's Grammar 4, but they frequently link the rules closely to usage, or Hartwell's Grammar 3. In addition to linking rules and usage, they also combined grammar and communication. Hartwell's Grammar 5 deals with teaching and understanding writing in that it, "Helps students use their metalinguistic knowledge, their conscious knowledge of Grammar 1, to convey meaning and purpose" (Patterson, 2001, p. 53). The communication link the teachers saw between grammar and writing may be found in Hartwell's Grammar 5.

The first research question for this study asks the following: What are teachers' definitions of "grammar" as related to the teaching of English language arts? In order to learn about the participants' perspectives, I asked the teachers to write their definitions of grammar at the beginning of the professional learning course, at the end of the professional learning course, and on the open-ended questionnaire. During their interviews, I asked several questions related to defining grammar, including asking them to tell how they thought the people from whom they learned grammar defined it. As I analyzed their interviews and observed them on the video tapes, I also looked for words and actions they associated with grammar.

My analysis of data revealed four distinct similarities in the teachers' definitions of grammar. First, they stated in various ways that grammar is a set of rules that governs functions of words in sentences or in language. Some of them associated the rules of grammar to the systematism of math. Second, as they thought about grammar, they drew connections between various forms of grammar: reading, writing, and speaking. Third, they were in accord that grammar is a tool for effective communication. Fourth many times during this study, the participants stated that grammar indicates a "correct" way of

using English. The following discussion is organized around these four themes and includes statements the participants used as they defined grammar themselves.

Grammar: A Set of Rules for Using Language

This section includes the participants' definitions related to rules, functions, systematism, and usage. Although definitions related to communication will be discussed in another section, the participants frequently linked rules and communication.

Melinda combined rules, usage, and communication in her definitions of grammar, "I would say that it's [grammar] a way to put sentence parts together so they communicate effectively, and the parts of speech, punctuation. You have to have some kind of rules to put things together so that you can communicate effectively" (I-1, p. 6). She went on to discuss why we need rules, "We are taught these rules so that it makes sense. If you read a sentence that has run-ons or comma splices, you read it and say, 'I don't understand what you're saying.' So that's why we need rules, so we can communicate" (I-1, p. 6). Since her first undergraduate degree was in accountancy, and one of her middle school concentrations is math, she enjoys the way math is systematic, and she believes that the rules of grammar are similarly systematic,

> Doing grammar is fun for me because it is very systematic, just like math. Even though I planned on being a math person, all these people who were the hard-core English people – I was getting higher scores because it was so systematic. I am very good at memorizing rules, so everyone thought that was so amazing. (I-1, p. 7)

Emily defined grammar in terms of parts of speech and usage, "the eight parts of speech and their functions in writing, as well as the syntax of writing" (C-1). The term "function," for Emily, is related to rules. She more closely associated grammar with rules when she gave her words associated with grammar:

> Correctness, parts of speech, punctuation, capitalization, syntax, mechanics, complete sentences, correct sentences – just rules, breaking it down, learning how to break down a sentence so that you know what each word's function is. Functionability, that's another word for grammar, I guess. (I-1, p. 6)

During the first class of the professional learning course, Emily examined the definitions of grammar from the books they were to read during the course. She was particularly interested in the definition from Schuster:

> I'm interested in what Schuster said about teaching the rules because that's basically what we're teaching them. We're teaching them rules…. And that's what I'm telling the kids: You've got to remember the rules; there are formulas involved here. (PLC-1, p. 1)

Although her teaching philosophies and styles vary from Emily and Melinda, Molly shares the idea that grammar is a set of rules. She defined grammar in terms of rules several times. One definition stated that grammar was, "A set or system of rules and conventions and models that governs and/or influences written and spoken language" (C-2). In her questionnaire, she linked the set of rules to usage, "I'd define it as a set of rules and conventions designed to govern written and spoken language. For instance, in English, the subject of a sentence should agree with the verb in gender and number" (Q, p. 1).

Mark, the only male member of our professional learning community also defined grammar in terms of rules and usage: "The definition of grammar I have come to adopt is a set of rules for effectively using Standard English" (Q, p. 1). He was consistent with this definition and gave an almost identical definition on his card during our last class. When he was asked to associate words with the term "grammar," he, like Emily and Melinda thought of parts of speech and defined grammar as, "Parts of speech, punctuation usage, general word usage, rules for using Standard English, understanding

syntax, all those, I associate with grammar" (I-1, p. 6). He also defined grammar in terms of "structure" related to communication by closely tying it to rules, "[Grammar is] the structure that overlays communication, and it's the rules by which we communicate." (I-3, p. 9)

Violet, like the others, defined grammar in terms of rules in her questionnaire, "A way to speak and write using specific rules" (Q, p. 1).

Grammar: Reading, Writing, and Speaking

"Grammar and writing are so inextricably linked as to be virtually synonymous. To study one is to study the other" (Sams, 2003, p. 57). The participants in the current study saw connections among various forms of reading, writing, and speaking. When I asked them about their first experiences with grammar, several of them began by discussing how they learned to read. All of the participants associated grammar with writing, and some of them also associated grammar with speaking. Some of the comments that made the connection between speaking and grammar also related to correctness, which I will discuss later in this chapter. The following excerpts illustrate their associations among forms of literacy.

Reading

Several of the teachers thought of learning to read when I asked them about memories of grammar at an early age. Melinda's earliest recollections of grammar were of reading picture books with her mom, "I remember having a difficult time when we were doing ABCDEFG. I couldn't figure out the E" (I-1, p. 1).

Jennifer's first memories of grammar were also of reading with her parents: "I was kind of making up the story as I went along, and I think that sort of sparked my

primary interest in writing and reading, and, therefore, the grammar sort of fell into place" (I-1, p. 1).

Molly also talked about learning to read when I asked her about her early experiences with grammar. She did, however, make a distinction between reading and grammar, "My mother taught me to read. I remember being four or five years old and knowing how to read. I just never dealt with grammar until getting some direct grammar instruction in seventh grade" (I-1, p. 1). She made the connection, again, between reading and grammar when she thought about elementary school, "I remember reading and phonics some, if you want to call that grammar" (I-1, p. 1).

Mark linked grammar and reading together in his role as a teacher. He said of the reading class he taught,

> "I will show them [the students] where authors have taken freedoms with grammar. I've had to do that quite a bit with Tom Sawyer, especially since we covered dialect. I've shown them how dialect can be powerful and that the same sort of grammar rules don't apply in one region or another. (I-2, p. 6)

Writing

The teachers also defined grammar in terms of writing. They discussed their personal writing, teaching writing, and current forms of writing, such as email and blogging. The participants in this study discussed the connection between writing and grammar in their own lives as well as in the lives of their students.

Violet formed her grammar associations as an adult. She had negative connotations for grammar in connection with writing: "I remember grammar as a red pen all over my paper. It was always what I was doing wrong, not what I was doing right" (I-1, p. 1). Her associations with the red pen and writing made her, "…write less and write

more simplistic because I didn't really know" (I-1, p. 6). She also said that grammar is, "It's all about proofing and making the writing better" (I-2, p. 1). Her cards, both at the beginning and the end of the professional learning course, connected grammar to writing: "Grammar should be focused initially on recognition and understanding and then focused on application. Grammar instruction should improve writing" (C-1); "Teaching students to write and speak well by using strategies that help them express themselves well" (C-2). She was concerned that her eighth-grade students do not make the connection between writing and grammar:

> And then it's like today's a grammar day, tomorrow's a writing day, today's a grammar day, tomorrow's a writing day. O.K. Why are we doing this? I haven't met an eighth-grader yet who knows why we're doing that. Not one of them made the connection that it makes their writing better. (I-3, p. 9)

When she reflected on elementary school, Melinda linked grammar with handwriting or early forms of writing: "I remember my teachers telling my parents that I had such wonderful cursive….I remember that they said, 'How did she get such wonderful handwriting?'" (I-1, p. 1) She divided grammar and writing in her mind, but she always discussed them together when she talked about her experiences with grammar: "I don't remember writing. I just remember grammar" (I-1, p. 1); "I was good at grammar. I could do a complete sentence, and doing that sort of thing; it was just making it creative" (I-1, p. 2); and "Doing grammar is fun for me because it is very systematic…. Ask me to write something, and I may not be as good at writing" (I-1, p. 7). She also connected writing and grammar when she talked about instructing her students, "So every month, most of it's taken up with writing, and then what's left over is grammar's pushed in…. I don't know if you want to call it grammar, but they're being

taught how to start, how to write sentences, how to put the paragraphs together" (I-1, p. 6).

For Emily, speaking, writing, and language are all associated with grammar. Like Melinda, Emily blurs the distinction between writing and grammar.

When asked about her experiences with grammar, she talked about writing:

> I like to write, if and, when I have time; however, I have precious little time as a teacher to have any spare time to write… maybe after I retire. Everything is school related at the moment. You know, writing letters to parents or grading papers, or, you know, just the things like that. I don't have time to use grammar to write…. I mean in general, I guess just speaking it and writing when I get a chance, which isn't very often. (I-2, p. 2)

Molly believes that grammar is important to writing, "Ultimately, it's a stepping-stone to learning to write well" (I-3, p. 1). She sees a connection between writing and grammar, but she is not sure if her students do:

> I think they might perceive it as being something separate from writing. Here's grammar; here's writing. They're two separate things altogether. And that's really a big conundrum there. They don't make the connection between learning about correlative conjunctions, or whatever, dangling modifiers – what they are, to implementing that in their writing. (I-3, p. 6)

Mark said that grammar is, "the means of forming thoughts into comprehensible text" (C-1). He sees grammar as an organizational tool for students to use, particularly in the editing and proofreading stages:

> I've always liked the way that grammar helps us organize the mind when you are writing, but sometimes I think that we go too far with it, and it becomes too much overhead for our students. It impedes stream of consciousness and flow of writing because they engage that grammar overseer part of their minds before they can actually complete a thought on page. I think grammar is especially powerful at the editing and proofreading stages. (I-1, p. 7)

Some of the teachers also discussed the newer forms of writing available to students through technology and the Internet. Jennifer was concerned about its effects on students' use of grammar:

> Today, with the emergence and booming of instant messenger and text messaging and all these things that kids are writing, they're not paying attention to their grammar. They get into these bad habits of not capitalizing, of shortening their words to digits or symbols, or whatever, so as we may be studying comma splices, I'll notice that they've written t-o as the number 2, or I'll notice that they'll say w-u-z instead of w-a-s…. I guess it's a different grammar. It's a non-academic type of grammar that is acceptable in the world of instant messenger, the world of text-messaging, and E-mail…. Would that be considered social grammar sort of thing? I don't know if there's a term. Maybe we've just coined a new phrase. (I-3, p. 9)

Mark also associated grammar in writing to students' new modes of communication:

> I do see the text messaging codes cropping up every once in a while …. I find that if I give them a very formal topic, that disappears, or at least it's not as prevalent. But if I give them a topic that says write a letter to a friend telling them how your day was, it will show up. It demonstrates a hierarchy of language there. (I-2, p. 6)

Violet expressed concern about Internet usage as well, "What I hate is all over the Internet, the grammar is so poor, and I'm not talking speaking jargon. I'm going, they don't do anything. They don't even put a period. I mean it's gotten to the point where it's worse than just writing a note," (I-2, pp. 7-8). She went on to discuss blogging specifically, "When it's blogging, It's just like writing a note to a friend. It supposedly doesn't matter. I've always been taught if you're going to put it on paper, it's there forever" (I-2, p. 8). Because she believes grammar is so important, Violet is bothered by grammatically incorrect written and Internet correspondence. She said of herself, "I want

to die if I press enter and there's a mistake in it. I have to send it back out again and say I'm sorry" (I-2, p. 9).

Speaking

In addition to reading and writing, the participants in this study associated grammar with speaking. Sometimes they referred to their own speech; at other times, they referred to the speech of others. This section relates the ways in which the participants defined grammar as it relates to spoken language.

Molly made the connection between grammar, linguistics, and speaking when she talked about her interest in the vernacular: "Dealing with vernacular, colloquialisms, spoken language, and that kind of thing also kind of generated stronger interest in grammar as I became an adult" (I-3, pp. 1-2). She isn't sure how to use her interest in vernacular in the classroom, "I'm not sure how that might really dovetail with grammar per se" (I-2, p. 2).

When she talked about learning grammar, Emily, while discussing correctness, related grammar to spoken language, "From my parents, number one, listening to them and just feeling the correct way to say things because my parents always talked correctly" (I-1, p. 1). When she thought about writing, she connecting it to speaking, "I would write the way I speak…. How in the world could this not be right?" (I-2, p. 5). She also discussed thinking of grammar when she heard others speak, "I think a minister who gets up and speaks incorrect language or grammar probably doesn't have as big of an impact or as much of an impact as someone who speaks on a more educated level" (I-3, p. 3).

Mark believes that one of the reasons he had no difficulty with grammar was because his parents, "Both practiced Standard English in the household…. I don't think

that I can pick up on an accent or dialect" (I-1, p. 4). He said that the home dialects of his students may interfere with grammar, "I think our students, in particular, are not exposed to Standard English outside the school setting. The accent may hinder them, but that's a matter of learning to code switch" (I-2, p. 12).

Jennifer said that she learned grammar from her mom during, "basically, more an oral exchange" (I-1, p. 1). Speaking of her mother and work, she again recalled dialect and spoken grammar, "She would use correct grammar when she spoke most of the time" (I-1, p. 6). She believes her students need to use "correct" spoken grammar in order to succeed in the future, "If you can't speak properly, you can't communicate effectively. That's going to have a real affect on if you get a job or how they will see you" (I-3, p. 1).

Violet recalled her early grammar, "Coming from England, they always spoke very proper. It was very important to speak – it [grammar] was more based on speaking than on writing" (I-1, p. 3). She also connected grammar to writing and speaking in one of her definitions, "Grammar is supposed to be about writing well, speaking well, making sense of the world around you" (I-3, p. 1).

Grammar: A Communication Tool

Many of the participants' definitions of grammar related to communication. Some of them also indicated that terminology associated with grammar aids in the effort to communicate. Grammar as a form of communication overlaps with the correctness of grammar in the area of usage, but there are distinctions. The definitions related to communication more frequently dealt with writing, while the definitions related to correctness more frequently applied to speech. The definitions related to communication

deal with clarification of meaning in writing, a tool or protocol for writing, and a shared vocabulary or commonly accepted lexicon.

Melinda worked in the world of business before becoming an educator. She saw communication as the primary role of grammar: "I knew I would have to teach them [the students] how to write, and I felt I would also have to teach them grammar because I felt that they needed to effectively communicate" (I-1, p. 4); "Grammar is to express clarification within writing" (C-2); and "Grammar is used to clarify meaning" (Q, p. 1).

Melinda also saw the need for teaching students the terminology associated with grammar: "You have to learn the terminology…. I think that's the hardest part for students, all those different words" (I-1, p. 7); "You know, there are a lot of names for things, and if they don't know what something means, they're confused. But if you say it a different way and you don't say that term, they understand. It seems difficult" (I-1, p. 6).

Emily defined grammar in terms of communication at one point. She said the purpose of grammar was, "To help you communicate most effectively with others in whatever field you're working in, whether it's a job or whether it's teaching your children" (I-3, p. 3). During her last class, she also wrote on her card that grammar was, "The correct usage of words and syntax in writing and communication" (C-2).

Molly was more interested in the writing aspects of language arts than in grammar, but when she associated words with grammar, she defined grammar in terms of communication and terminology, "Conditions for writing and communicating through writing" (I-1, p. 3), and "commonly accepted lexicon"(I-1, p. 3).

One of Violet's definitions of grammar clearly states her opinion of grammar as a communication tool: "I've got to define it [grammar] as a tool to help kids write better. And that's it. It's a skill; it's a tool; and it's there for one purpose, one purpose only, to help you write and speak. That's it" (I-3, p. 13). Violet also talked about the importance of terminology associated with grammar: "I've also come to the conclusion that you have to be able to recognize and understand a shared vocabulary to be able to apply it" (I-1, p. 4).

For Mark, one of the most important aspects of grammar was it's affect on communication. He believes that grammar is a set of tools to shape students' writing into a form that helps students communicate:

> As a teacher, I think it's interesting to see how grammar can shape students' writing, how the rules of grammar, once they're applied and once they're learned, can shape students' writing and can change it. I tend to think of it as either a playground or a toolbox, in a sense. And it's filled with tools that can really strengthen writing and really open the doors to more critical writing, in a sense, because grammar helps us to, sometimes forces us to, organize our words. (I-2, p. 1)

By using the tools of grammar, Mark believes that students are able to take the grammar that is in their heads, Hartwell's Grammar 1, and transform it into something that other people can read and understand, Hartwell's Grammar 5:

> So we take our words out of the cloud of imagination and thoughts that exist in our minds and put them on the paper in a way that can be transferred and communicated to other people. So, in a sense, it's also a communication, a means of communication. The more closely we follow and know grammar as communicators, the easier it is for us to communicate with each other because we have a common set of protocol, in a sense. (I-2, p. 1)

When he talked about writing in student journal entries, he saw a gap between writing and communication skills:

> So, I'm really trying to focus on the gaps in the communication skills without giving them too much overhead that that becomes primary in my instruction. So grammar has not taken a backseat in my instruction, but I focus on communication, and along the way, grammar comes into play. Grammar is a layer of communication, a protocol for communication, as I said earlier, and they [the students] are often not aware of that. (I-2, p. 2)

He believes it is very important for students to know grammar: "Once they take the rules of grammar out and say don't use grammar, they see how communication decays. So when they go back in and apply those rules, it brings it back to life" (I-2, p. 11).

Jennifer believes that grammar is a standardized communication tool, "…you know, it's a standardized way of conveying a message so that everyone can understand it" (I-1, p. 6). She was the only participant who differentiated between home language and Standard English on a personal level as she discussed her family's communication: "But when we get around our family, of course, that Appalachian Southern drawl comes out, and we get all kinds of crazy idioms and silly little words and phrases that we use" (I-1, p. 6). For her, communication takes place on multiple levels.

Although Jennifer finds grammar, "…tedious at times" (I-1, p. 6), she also believes that it is a useful communication tool for her students to learn,

> They're not going to get very far in life because our whole society is turning into a communicating society…. Look at the Internet, look at the newspaper, look at all this stuff. Reading and writing is all around us, one day you're going to be a part of this writing phenomenon, and you need to know how to communicate. Otherwise, you're going to be crippled. (I-2, p. 11)

She also defined grammar as, "A standardized form of communication. It may not be the 'proper' or accepted pattern of speech, but it is in such a way that speakers and listeners can communicate effectively" (Q, p. 1).

Grammar: The Correctness of Standard English

During our conversations, the participants called Standard English the *correct* form of English. Some were adamant about the importance of correctness, while others merely mentioned it. Some of the comments about correctness relate to defining grammar, and some of them relate to beliefs. I will discuss the comments about beliefs in the next section. For the participants, the correctness of the grammar of Standard English related more closely to spoken grammar, but there is an overlap with written language. The differences between communication and correctness were in the effects on the listener or reader. For the participants, lack of correctness is present in dialects and can be annoying to the listener. Several of the participants indicated that they learned the correctness of grammar at an early age from their parents. Ehrenworth (2003) says of her own experiences in the classroom that it is difficult not to look for what is wrong with papers, "We want to correct. We want to instruct. We want to tell them how to do it right" (p. 91).

Emily was adamant about the correctness of grammar, "I can tell you that through my experiences just growing up, at school, in college, teaching it, and just as a speaker of the English language, there is so much correctness" (I-1, p. 8). This quotation describes Emily's commitment to the idea that there are "correct" and "incorrect" ways to speak and write. She said that as a child, her mother corrected her speech, and she corrects the speech of her children and her students:

> As I had children, I would do the same thing. And when I started teaching, I would do it with my students. I would always correct them. When they would say, 'Me and so and so wants to go to the library,' I would say, 'Who?' They would say 'Me and so and so,' and I would say, 'Who?' 'Oh, so and so and I want to go to the library,' when they finally catch on. (I-1, p. 3)

Emily believes that maturity plays a role in learning "correct" grammar. She said, "I sure wish I had listened in school earlier, years ago" (I-1, p. 3). These beliefs about maturity also affect her expectations of her students:

> For the longest time I thought, gosh, if I know the right way to write a sentence, then I believe my students should be able to learn that as well…. But then at the same time, I realized that my students are not taking it seriously like I am as an adult. I didn't either when I was a student, you know, their age. So I learned it eventually. All I can do is hope that they will too. (I-3, pp. 1-2)

One of her definitions was about correctness, "I define grammar as the correct usage of words and syntax in the formation of sentences" (Q, p. 1). Another definition also related to correctness, "Using words correctly in your writing and communicating" (I-3, p. 10). She linked correct usage to dialect:

> Sometimes I slur my words without realizing it. It's sort of like saying "y'all" instead of you all. Or, I just sort of combine words that, I'll say, just things I do all the time. I'll say "uh huh" instead of yes. I mean just things. That would be hard because when I stop and think about it, I wouldn't do it. (I-2, p. 7)

From the previous quotations, it seems evident that for Emily, speaking and using "correct" grammar is very important

Mark's earliest memory of grammar is of the way his parents spoke. He said of his early memories, "I don't remember being corrected except for my use of 'tooken' instead of 'taken.' My mother corrected me. I hear it in my class now, and it's engrained in my mind to correct them" (I-1, p. 4). He associated dialects with the learning of his students:

> This gets into the window of when do I recognize and give space to dialect and when does it become an obstacle to learning Standard English. I think our students, in particular, are not exposed to Standard English a lot of times outside the school setting. And the accent may hinder them, but

> that's a matter of learning to code switch. But you have to practice that in order to do that, and I think that's what we're missing a lot times once they leave the school. (I-2, pp. 12-13)

Melinda, like Emily and Mark recalled learning experiences associated with dialect and connected them to correct usage:

> When I lived in Ohio, people could tell from, I might say, like I might say 'warsh' for 'wash' because my parents would say 'Warsh the clothes.' Some things I might say, I wouldn't pronounce correctly. That's the way I talk. And people will correct me every once in a while if I say something; even the kids correct me if I say something. I say, 'Oh, you'll have to excuse me. That's my dialect. That's the way I grew up. From then on, I'll pronounce it this way. I'll correct myself if I find myself doing it. (I-1, p.6)

She also thought about the correctness of grammar from a written perspective, "Being in the business world, if you get a letter that's not grammatically correct, it doesn't look well on the sender I think" (I-1, p. 4). She also said about business communication, "Whatever you put on the computer, someone may be reviewing it. I mean you want to put it down appropriately" (I-3, p. 5).

Molly is interested in the vernacular of individuals. She pays attention to the way people speak and sees an incorrectness in some spoken dialects,

> Just noticing how other people use it, or misuse it. I kind of pay attention to that and find it interesting, like people say 'might could' or 'I don't care to go,' meaning I don't mind going. That kind of thing, I guess. Just kind of paying attention to them, noticing them. Maybe using some of that in my writing a little bit when I'm trying to write vernacular. (I-2, p. 3)

Usage is also important to Molly. It bothers her, "When someone doesn't display subject/verb agreement or says 'have went.' These examples are very jarring to me. I hate it, too, when someone misuses its/it's or you're/your" (Q, p. 2).

Jennifer began believing there was a correct form of language when her mother corrected her sentences as a child: "I do remember being corrected as a child. My mom

would, you know, if I would say a sentence incorrectly, she would correct me and have me say it the right way. Eventually, I would pick up the correct form – I guess the grammatical form" (I-1, p. 1).

Violet indicated a connection between education and correctness when she discussed taking English in college. She said that she took English as a second concentrate in college because, "I thought all good teachers need to know how to write and speak correctly to a very high level" (I-1, p. 8).

Teachers' Beliefs about Grammar

None of the participants in this study viewed grammar as a one-dimensional concept. Their definitions of grammar and their beliefs were closely linked. The second section of this chapter will deal with research question number two: What are teachers' beliefs about "grammar" as related to the teaching of language arts?

These teachers believed that Standard American English is the correct form of grammar and that being able to speak and write using the rules that govern SAE gives power to its users. They also focused on preparing students for the language arts portion of standardized testing. This may have been due partly to the timing of the interviews in March and April because teachers administer statewide standardized testing at the end of April. The beliefs that these teachers had about teaching through traditional methods and innovative methods emerged as a third theme. In summary, several important beliefs about "grammar" and "grammar instruction" emerged that were closely related to the participating teachers' definitions of "grammar": a focus on the power of Standard American English, an attention to the importance of grammar for standardized testing, and the interplay between traditional and innovative grammar instruction.

The Power of Standard American English

The participants saw the power of using Standard American English. They believed that it was the "correct" form of grammar to use in spoken and written communication. For them, lack of correctness indicates lack of education, stigmatizes the user, and indicates socio-economic status. These teachers believed that correctness of grammar also affects future job opportunities and social connections of their students.

As discussed in the previous section, Emily firmly believes that Standard American English uses the correct form of grammar. She believes there are advantages of speaking correct grammar and disadvantages in not speaking it:

> I think good grammar, when it's spoken correctly, gives the connotation to others that you're an educated person, and that's something to respect. I think when you talk without using good grammar, and for those people who do speak good grammar and do know good grammar, we have a tendency, or I do, and I'm sure most people are like this, have a tendency when you hear someone speaking incorrectly, in our own minds we think he said that wrong…. I don't know. Something's triggered. Well, that person's not as educated as they should be. (I-3, pp. 2-3)

Jennifer also thought of grammar in connection to education. She believes that use of "correct" grammar indicates level of education and affects the way other people react:

> If I come in here talking like I've never been to school before, you're going to think one thing about me than if I come in here talking proper grammar. So, it's sort of a status symbol, and I think that's kind of what they [her teachers] tried to project to us – if you don't know this, if you're not able to speak like this, then you aren't going to be viewed as well as you can. (I-1, p. 8)

Molly saw a connection between education, socio-economic status, and the correctness of language:

> My mom was an English teacher, so she used really correct grammar. There was some slang and vernacular there, but both my parents were

> really well educated. My dad was a lawyer. I did hear a lot of country vernacular, but I was able to contextualize it. I went to a small private school with fairly well to do students. There was almost no poverty around me as a child, except maybe a little bit here around the edges. The people I was most closely associated with would have had pretty good strong grammar. (I-1, p. 3)

Melinda and Mark worked in the business world before deciding to teach, so they brought those perspectives into their thoughts on the power of grammar. Melinda believes that she knows what employers expect of her students when they graduate from high school and tries to prepare her eighth-grade students for their future careers. She made this point clear on several occasions. She said the following during her first interview:

> Being in the business world, if you get a letter that's not grammatically correct, it doesn't look well on the sender, I think. So, grammar is important, but they [students] also need to know how to write. In the perspective that I felt like I couldn't write, I try to encourage the students that really can't write, and I also try to teach them correct grammar so that it looks good from the front. (I-1, p. 5)

She reiterated her point about grammar's power during her second interview:

> They [the students] don't seem to, at this age, understand how important it is to learn the formal English, how it's going to impact them when they get older…. A lot of them say they're not going to go to college, and… "What do I need to know grammar for?" "What do I need to know how to write for?" And I say, you'll be surprised; somebody's going to ask you to write a paragraph about why they should hire you for this job…. You may be going to go to work in Publix, and they want to make sure you're the right type of person, but they're going to want to know you're literate. I just wish there were more real-life examples that I could give them. (I-2, pp. 11-12)

She also emphasized the importance of grammar in her third interview, "I think grammar is very important inside school or outside of school. You use it all the time" (I-3, p. 3).

When I asked Mark to reflect on grammar in the workplace, he acknowledged its power:

> Outside the classroom, professionals, managers, and presidents of companies expect correct grammar. I think in places where image is important, positions of high authority, that's where the understanding of the power of language becomes crucial. (I-2, p. 4)

He talked of his experiences with grammar in the business world, and his response reflected the importance he places on grammar:

> Well, I think it has an importance outside of school that our students don't often fully recognize, or they can't because they haven't been exposed to it. Many of our students, in particular, haven't been exposed to places where grammar can open doors, the power of language, the content. And outside of school, that's where I have seen grammar having an impact. I've worked in the corporate world, and I've also worked in small companies who needed to look good on paper. Particularly in the software industry, your sales staff is usually your image in the world, and it's also a primary source of advertisement. And our sales staff was constantly putting together documentation and demos, and, you know, when we communicate with a company, our grammar calls attention to itself when it's a sloppy presentation (I-3, pp. 1-2).

Mark also discussed his students' lack of understanding of the power of grammar. He is concerned that they are not aware of its power, and he tries to teach them its power:

> Sometimes it can be boring to my students, and my struggle is to find ways to make it interesting for them and to show them. The one thing that I have really tried to impress in my teaching is how to make it relevant to them. And I think I've had to resort to teaching them the language of power and the doors that it opens. I don't know how my feelings on that are with respect to, you know, what grammar can do for opening doors. (I-1, p. 7)

He recalled his own learning of the power of grammar, "That's just one of the values that I received as a student, so I'm trying to pass that along to my students (I-2, p. 13). He said, "I'm worried about their ability to be successful in the future" (I-2, p. 15).

Jennifer believes in the power of grammar for herself and her students. She related her beliefs:

> As an English teacher, I am expected to communicate with a higher caliber of writing and communication, so even with Emails, I have to be

> really careful to make sure….I need to make sure that I've punctuated things, I've spelled things correctly, that I'm wording things that are grammatically correct. Because I don't know what the other person on the other side of that computer knows, and I need to make sure that I have covered all my bases. Otherwise, I am not going to be taken seriously. Because I am so young, I need to project myself with a more professional, mature, sort-of way, I guess. (I-2, p. 2)

For her students, she believes, "I think that I've brought them to the realization that it is important to know grammar" (I-2, p. 1).

Jennifer believes that the grammar people use in writing and speaking influences their chances in the world outside of school:

> Now that I'm older and I realize the importance of having good grammar, and as I look at people around me and I pick up little nuisances, I realize the importance of grammar…. Because it is sort of that code of power – that people who don't speak with the proper grammar don't have that sort of step up, where people who can speak properly are able to have that boost in power. (I-3, p. 1)

When I asked her about the definitions of others in relation to grammar, she believed that they defined it in terms of power, "I think they defined it as a way to assess, maybe assess like our status in the world because having proper grammar and using Standard English is that sort of power (I-1, p. 8).

Emily also discussed the importance of grammar for her students. Emily said about teaching grammar, "I have learned to love grammar. It is fun to teach it, primarily because I now feel successful with it. Knowledge really is power!" (Q, p. 3).

Violet sometimes expressed the greatest concern of any of the participants about teaching grammar because she believes it is so powerful: "I wish I knew more about – I feel terrified about it – still do. I know how important it is, but I can't tell you – guesstimate – I know I didn't have formal grammar classes" (I-1, p. 10). She reiterated its importance in her second interview:

> It wasn't until I started writing formally in my masters program that I realized I wasn't as good as I thought I was, that I needed help, and that people showed me along the way. I mean things are so important, like the commas, the tense is a big thing, keeping the same tense because I'm all over the place. (I-2, p. 8)

When I asked her what made her uneasy about grammar, she said, "Oh, yes. Yeah, because I know grammar is power, and I've never considered I was good at it personally…. That's why it makes me feel uncomfortable, because I know the power of it" (I-2, p. 11). On another occasion, she, again, emphasized power, "But it's powerful when you apply it to writing, not in itself. That's the difference. So that's what I'm doing. I'm trying to make it powerful" (I-3, p. 4).

The Importance of Teaching Grammar for Standardized Tests

During each one of our professional learning class meetings and during the interviews, particularly the second interviews, the topic of standardized tests came up frequently. The second interviews took place during March and April, which was shortly before the state testing window in late April. The timing of the interviews may have added to the number of times testing was mentioned; however, being a teacher in the same county as the participants, I know that preparing for standardized tests is a high priority year-round. Many times the comments were short asides to the conversation, but they were present in the participants' beliefs about their teaching of grammar.

The participants expressed concern about being held responsible for students' scores on the standardized language arts test. I interviewed Emily in May and asked her if there was anything else she would like to discuss that I had not asked her. Her response indicated her concern about standardized tests and grammar instruction:

> Standardized testing, perhaps, of grammar, because that's so big, and we are evidently held so accountable for it. Is what we're going to teach in

> the context of writing, is it going to cover that, the CRCT? Do you think the kids will remember it and internalize it enough to be able to recognize it on the CRCT? I don't know. I guess that would be a concern, you know, teaching it in the way we're talking about even though I think it's the best way. Is it going to keep my job for me if they don't pass the CRCT. I guess that's the biggest issue, not the biggest issue, but it's an issue to be considered. I think it's doable. Do you think the kids have internalized it enough to have done well on the CRCT? (I-3, pp. 9-10)

Molly also expressed concern about testing, "I worry that there's going to be stuff on the standardized test that they're not going to be prepared for by me" (I-2, p. 8). She also spoke specifically about teaching verbals:

> I struggle with teaching verbals. That's been a real struggle for me, and I don't really think there's that much of a need for them to know gerunds and participles necessarily in the eighth grade, but it is. I did try and kind of give it to them because it's on the test. It's part of the curriculum, and I think there are ways you can make participles, using participles, that can facilitate stronger writing with them. (I-2, p. 1)

Jennifer worried about preparing her students for testing. She was concerned that her teaching of writing instead of grammar might have an impact on her students' scores:

> I worry about standardized testing because I wonder, like with the CRCT, we've been hammering, hammering, and hammering the writing, so I wonder how well they're going to do on the standardized test. It's [the test] grading me, and that's what terrifies me is that I'm already a second year teacher, and I've had problems with different issues in my classroom this year. So I worry about are they ready? (I-2, p. 11)

Mark was concerned that the terminology he had taught his students might not be the same as the terminology his students encountered on the test, "Actually, the terminology that's sometimes found in textbooks is not going to match up to the standards, so when they get to the test, modifier may be a new word for them" (I-2, p. 12). He said that he had gone back and done additional teaching, "I've had to go back. At the beginning of the year, I didn't realize that. Once I got to see the CRCT online, I

was like, uh oh, I've got to teach 'modifier.' I need to teach what 'modifier' means because that's a broad term, and it can refer to phrases (I-2, p. 12).

Some of the participants pondered methods of teaching grammar for the CRCT. Melinda commented about grammar and tests, "I think it's a good thing. You need to know it. I just think it's difficult to teach, but they have to know how to identify. They need to know it. It's the tests they have to take, because they are going to ask them those questions" (I-1, p. 7). When she was discussing preparing for the CRCT, she said,

> Basically, they've been doing them everyday and then having them do analysis on each one as to why did they miss it…. But, as far as trying to cram them to learn grammar, if they don't already know it, it's very difficult for them to learn it in that little period of time…. It just kind of reminds them, but in two weeks they forget it. (I-2, p. 2)

She mentioned methods of preparing for testing on another occasion, "But, I would rather do hands-on things like those games and stuff that we came up with in class for CRCT, or whatever else we need to do" (I-2, p. 5).

Molly approached standardized testing with an idea of making the review more interesting to her students: "They are in pairs or three and they come up with twenty questions that they like or they adapt from CRCT on line. Once they did that, they have to pick five questions" (PLC2, p. 5). Molly continued describing a scavenger hunt she had her students create in preparation for the CRCT.

Violet talked about CRCT testing more than the other participants. She has been using alternative methods of teaching grammar since she began teaching five years ago, but she feels that she is in the minority. She teaches students who have been selected for additional help because they do not do well in school and says that her test scores are not

as high as those who teach students with average to above average grades. She says that most of the language arts teachers at her school teach traditional grammar, and says,

> And they're thrilled with their scores; their scores are higher than mine. Their CRCT scores are absolutely higher than mine, but my writing scores are better. My average, this is the lowest class rate for me [speaking of the CRCT]. 95% is low for me. I usually get 96% to 98%.. But this is the first year 100% of my kids passed the writing test…. And if I don't drill on grammar, I spend my time teaching writing and trying to put that grammar into writing, and I'm not spending weeks and weeks on "this is a noun. (I-2, p. 13)

She says of testing,

> My purpose is not for students to pass the CRCT, even though, as a teacher, it probably should be. I really do think it depends on what you call yourself. I call myself a writing teacher. I don't want to teach grammar for the sake of teaching grammar. I fall back on it sometimes, but I don't know how not to. (I-2, p. 14)

Like Violet, Jennifer also mentioned the difference between her philosophy and the philosophies of her more traditional colleagues, "Maybe they're focusing on getting test-ready; whereas, I'm focusing on getting world-ready" (I-2, p. 8).

Violet has examined the state standards and the CRCT questions related to the new standards. She believes standardized tests of language arts are changing to reflect more writing, "When you pull up the practice test, it includes research, sentence structure, paragraph structure, and usage" (I-1, p. 10). She is happy that the CRCT is changing to reflect more writing skills:

> Actually, grammar is about proofreading, and I'm thrilled that the CRCT, the new questions on the CRCT, are backing up what I have thought…. So I'm not being forced to teach something I don't believe in anymore. And it's all about proofing and making the writing better. I'm still not sure about sure about transference, but I'm at least glad that we have to teach less recognition because of the CRCT; whereas, before I felt like I had to teach lots of things just because of the CRCT. (I-2, p. 1)

Traditional Grammar Instruction

The teachers in this study were members of a course on teaching grammar in the context of writing. They were all looking for alternative methods for teaching grammar, and they were all interested in learning new ideas for incorporating more writing in their classrooms. As they talked about their classrooms, the classrooms of teachers around them, and the ways teachers taught them, their beliefs about teaching grammar emerged. Sometimes they talked about traditional methods, and sometimes they talked about innovative methods. This section includes some of the things they said about traditional teaching methods in relation to grammar.

The teachers in this study used a variety of resources to find ideas for their teaching. Some of them talked about their thoughts in relationship to language arts textbooks. Melinda said this of using the textbook, "I try to force myself to use the textbook so that the students feel they have a resource. I don't want them to feel like all the answers are in the teacher's head and that they don't have somewhere to go" (I-2, p. 1).

Emily, the most traditional member of our learning community said, "I know quite a bit about traditional grammar" (Q, p. 3). When I asked her to tell me about her teaching methods, she laughed and said,

> Textbook, textbook, textbook. And the *Daily Grams* and things like that. Uh, following along with other teachers all these years, you know. They'll say, this is our viewpoint: 'we're going to teach a unit on nouns, a unit on pronouns, a unit on adjectives, etc. So that was as I was coming along in my teaching career. I realized, well, that's the way we do it. We teach the five parts of speech, and they [the students] need to know all these things about nouns, and then they need to know about pronouns, and adjectives, and verbs, and adverbs, and you know, my thought was, my biggest worry was when do I teach what. (I-2, p. 4)

Jennifer talked about when she uses the textbook to teach grammar, "On those days when I come in and I feel lousy, and I say, 'All right, guys, get out your grammar books. We're just going to do grammar today…. They behave much better. They are so quiet and just focused on that" (I-2, p. 7). She also recalled, "What I used to do, even at the beginning of this year, before I was able to come up with better ideas, we would do a short little project, and then we'd do grammar book, and then we'd do a short little project, and then we'd do grammar book (I-3, p. 5).

Mark uses a variety of methods in his classroom. He says his students enjoy using the textbook:

> I was surprised to find that my students actually enjoy textbook work because they get immediate feedback. It's all prescriptive exercises; it's easy for them to get it right. When they get into it, it's almost as if that's a playpen, and they know where the boundaries of the playpen are. (I-2, p. 8)

Molly admitted that even though she dislikes traditional grammar, she has occasionally taught using those methods: "When I first started teaching, the first couple of years I taught, I think I did things a lot more traditionally, with seventh grade especially, and I've really tried to step away from that in the last couple of years" (I-2, p. 5). She also said, "I've gotten lazy about it from time to time, but it definitely bugs me to think I'm just doing like a unit with all that stuff from the teacher's manual, and that's all I'm doing with like a part of speech or something. It just seems stultified to me" (I-2, p. 4). She called herself lazy for using the textbook, and she believes that may be the reason some teachers continue to use the textbooks and workbooks, instead of teaching within the context of writing:

> I don't mean to scold laziness in part of teachers to some extent. They need to kind of stay with the traditional and the known. And it is easier at

> times to grade worksheets or exercises than it is to grade essays or reams of student sentences and paragraphs and stuff. So, just, I think, teachers, kind of, a lot of teachers are still rooted in traditional things. (I-3, p. 6)

Sometimes the teachers used other materials to teach grammar in traditional ways. Mark and Jennifer talked about the value of *Daily Oral Language,* a book of warm up exercises for correcting grammatical errors in sentences and paragraphs. Jennifer spoke of a typical day or week with grammar, "Grammar is daily. I've said before that we do the *Daily Oral Language,* so they've picked up on the capitalize this, you need a period at the end sort of thing" (I-2, p. 2).

Mark works with his stepsons on work they bring home. He said of *Daily Oral Language,* "I think DOLs are good because it teaches him [his stepson] the editing process. It's one thing to have a toolbox; it's another thing to practice using tools" (I-3, p. 3). Mark related his own learning to the type of practice exercises he uses in his class:

> Other than the drill sessions that we had in seventh and eighth grade, you know they're negative, but in hindsight, I think they were useful because they were a means of practice. I tell my students now when I have a practice exercise, I tell them , if you think about it, this is sort of like football or any sport where you practice over and over again a basic or essential skill, which later on gets incorporated. (I-1, p. 9)

Emily uses *Daily Grams,* a book of practice exercises similar to *Daily Oral Language*:

> I sort of stopped doing this after a while, but I have *Daily Grams,* which is a book of just sentences. The first two sentences are written incorrectly with capitalization, the first one, the second one punctuation. The third and fourth questions are grammar related, and the fifth one is sentence combining. And we do those every day as a warm up and go over it. And those are ways to include every aspect of grammar. (I-2, p. 3)

In addition to using textbooks, sometimes the participants said they used worksheets. Emily recounted several teaching techniques she uses in her classroom and had this to say about worksheets,

> Worksheets can work fine, as well as application of knowledge. I guess there are different techniques…. Some kids learn it from just rules and formulas, and others learn it through making mistakes and learning how to correct those mistakes, identifying those mistakes so they can do better. (I-3, p. 4)

"Lots of things I swore I wouldn't do, I've done in the past, only because I didn't know how else to do it" (I-2, p. 11), Violet said of teaching grammar. She remembered as a beginning teacher, "The first few years, I did teach some grammar out of the workbooks, not the textbooks. I thought at that point that they needed some more repetition, that I wasn't giving them enough repetition. Nobody had taught me how to teach it in writing" (I-1, p. 11).

Some of the teachers felt the need to teach traditional grammar in order to conform to their school community. Melinda believes that she must teach consistently with other teachers in her department, many of whom are traditional teachers:

> I feel I need to teach certain things in a particular way to be consistent with other teachers in the way they feel that is the best way. I think teachers should be consistent so that if students switch classes. It's not going to be a new school, a new world, and I think it helps with collaboration, too, if you can kind of come to a compromise as to what to do. I usually give in because I'm new. (I-2, pp. 6-7)

Jennifer also spoke of other teachers who teach traditional grammar and the pressure she feels to conform:

> It's so easy to go with the flow and do what everyone else is doing. And I think that's what a lot of us have fallen into, even though in our hearts that that this isn't right. You know what, this is easier, and it keeps the kids quiet, and it gets us through the day without the least amount of frustration. And it's not frustrating on the behavior end or the chaos end,

> but it's frustrating in that in my heart, as a teacher, I know that I'm not doing the best for these kids. (I-3, p. 5)

Emily believes she might have developed different teaching strategies if she had not followed other teachers in her department, "I think that had I not been following along with some of these other teachers and trying to keep up with them, I probably would have developed my own program by now" (I-2, p. 5).

Some of the teachers expressed negative feelings about traditional grammar methods. When you read Molly's comments about grammar, you recognize her extreme dislike for teaching traditional grammar. Her first comment about traditional grammar was, "I find it really boring just to teach students lists" (I-1, p. 4). She also said, "I hate to just hit them [the students] with repetition after repetition" (I-2, p. 3). She teaches writing during most of her class time. In the same interview, she stated, "I try not to have a whole week ever be about grammar, just grammar. I think that would drive everybody crazy" (I-2, p. 3). Molly's early experiences as a student studying grammar helped shape her feelings, "I remember really not liking workbook exercises, exercises out of the textbook. I really did not like that kind of thing at all, and my experience with students has been that they didn't like it either (I-3, p. 3).

Jennifer's negative experiences with grammar made her want to look for alternative methods of teaching it: "Well, since I had such a negative experience with the, for lack of a better term, kill and drill sort of grammar, I shy away from that. I mean. I hate that" (I-3, p. 2). As a learner, she had difficulty with some aspects of grammar, "I never felt, I mean I kind of felt inwardly like why can't I get this, everybody else gets it. Why can't I get it? But everybody else didn't get it" (I-1, p. 8).

Violet believes that the eighth-grade curriculum has too much grammar, traditional or otherwise. On one occasion, Violet said, “I really don’t believe they need to know, I would say 70% of the grammar we drill every single week (I-3, p. 2), and on another occasion, she said, “I think that there is probably 50% of the grammar in our curriculum that does not need to be there. I think we over analyze everything (I-1, p. 4). Based on these two statements, it is fair to say that she believes we teach too much grammar. When we must teach it, she believes in using traditional and non-traditional methods to teach grammar: “And quite frankly, I think it needs to be traditional, the intermediate, the non-traditional, and depending on the topic, depending on how the kids – the kids can’t do a lot of non-traditional all the time (I-2, p. 2). She said, “I think there’s a place for it [traditional grammar] in the earlier grades, and I think there’s a place for it, actually, in the later grades. I just don’t necessarily think there’s a place for it in the eighth grade” (I-3, p. 9).

In contrast to the negative feelings of Molly and Jennifer, Melinda and Emily expressed positive feelings about traditional grammar methods. Melinda believes traditional methods that she encountered when she was a student helped her learn to be a better writer. She said, “I find things in my writing because they’ve drilled so hard on grammar. I can usually find things I wouldn’t have found before. I think it was because of the drilling because I am aware of things, common mistakes that people make” (I-2, p. 8).

Emily believes that her students learn well from traditional grammar methods. I asked her if she thought her students remembered what she taught using traditional methods. She responded,

> I think in the back of their minds, for the most part, they do. And I think that if they were to get on the next grade level, here's an adverb – find the adverbs – they should be able, you know, to remember some of the little techniques to do that. (I-2, p. 5)

Although she believes that her students will remember what she has taught them, she reflected about her students, "These seventh graders come to me, and they've forgotten what a noun is, even though they've been learning nouns for six years. They know, but they just couldn't tell you (I-2, p. 6).

Although Emily enjoys teaching grammar traditionally, she is considering alternative methods. Her thoughts on teaching grammar indicate the uncertainty she feels about changing teaching methods:

> I think my problem is giving up that authority. I don't know if it's authority, or just technique, or whatever it is. I have control over saying this how it is and saying, 'Now, this is a noun; this is what a noun does. You take over; you write them; you show me which ones are your nouns or whatever it is I need to do.' I have a real hard time giving the students control over their own learning, and that's a problem I know about for myself. (I-3, p. 5)

Innovative Grammar Instruction

The teachers participating in this study focused on teaching grammar in the context of writing during their professional learning course. Consequently, we discussed methods of teaching grammar in innovative ways, with particular focus on teaching grammar in the context of writing. Each of the teachers developed one or more lessons for teaching grammar in the context of writing. I will discuss those lessons in Chapter Five. This section of Chapter Four will focus on the beliefs that these teachers expressed about teaching grammar through innovative strategies.

Melinda is on the verge of teaching grammar in the context of writing: "So I feel like I need to do more writing, but I felt like grammar took a lot of the time up. So, I'm

trying to figure out how do I teach the grammar within my writing" (I-2, p. 11). She remembered a teacher she had in eighth grade who would show his writing to the class: "He actually would show his [writing] as he was typing, his personal experiences. It helped to write if he was you showing you something. I did that within my class, too. I told them one day, 'you're an adjective clause; describe yourself" (I-1, p. 9). The teacher showing his work left an impression. She said of modeling and writing, "I find that if you model something, they do better at it than if you explain it and they just follow a canned package. I think they learn more if their properties can be looked at. Yeah, I think they do learn more if they are dealing with their own product (I-2, p. 6).

Melinda recently took a class that focused on writing. She said that her teacher told them, "You just have to have them write every day, all the time. That's the only way to do it. It's not like you can teach grammar, then do some writing, teach grammar, then do some writing. So, it's kind of the same philosophy, teaching grammar within the writing" (I-3, p. 12). I asked her if she thought grammar could be taught strictly within the context of writing, and she answered, "Oh, yes. Because that's where you're using it, is when you write" (I-3, p. 9). She also said, "If you learn grammar within writing, and they're not dealing with the worksheets, I mean that's all they do every day, and that's just a comfort level now. Writing becomes a comfort level, no big deal (I-3, p. 9). She thinks teaching writing will help her students: "…But I know more writing, not teaching grammar and doing a lot of worksheets, so I'm going to try and keep incorporating small things with writing" (I-2, p. 11).

Emily examined the new state standards for eighth-grade language arts and saw the connection to writing: "I think the new performance standards, and with our

curriculum map, I think it's a little bit different now because they are focusing a lot more on writing" (I-2, p. 6). When she saw this new focus, she decided to try teaching writing. She had an unpleasant experience, "But after I had to grade those first narrative essays, it just blew me away…. I think the main thing that's the problem is that it's just too much to grade, grading writing. I have this innate need – this is wrong, to circle" (I-2, p. 6). She says of her students and writing:

> They see that they are going to write something that they're creative with, that's theirs, they have ownership of it. I think it's something they can write it, they can be proud of it. They don't care if it's a noun or verb; they don't care if it's plural or possessive, as long as it's there. That's why I think this whole thing is better, this writing and grammar in writing, because it gives them more ownership of it and creativity. (I-2, p. 7)

Although she believes it gives her students more creativity and ownership, she hesitates, "It's hard for me to give up control. It's so easy to say here are the rules" (I-2, p. 5). She believes, however, that it would be more difficult to grade:

> First of all, I think it's the diversity, I guess that's the word I'm looking for. In that every child is going to learn at a different pace, and they're going to write different things. In order for me now to go through grading something really quick – you know, I have a key; the key matches the test; you have a '100', than looking at someone's writing…. Everybody writes differently; everybody, you know, there will be so much more for me. I think that's the obstacle, the fear that I'll have more work to do in the grading. (I-3, pp. 5-6)

In addition to thinking it is difficult to grade writing, she also fears that her grading would not be the same for all students, "It's scary…. I'm wondering about the fairness of grading, assessment…. I think as far as teaching, it would be easier. As for assessment, it would be harder" (I-3, pp. 5-6).

Molly also mentioned that there is more work in grading writing than in grading grammar, "It's more work, so I think there might be some resistance, maybe, mainly from

teachers with more experience and more years because you've done something a certain way for a while" (I-2, p. 9).

Violet expressed similar sentiments about the grading. In spite of the benefits, she knows that it is challenging to teach grammar in the context of writing:

> I've known people who have dropped language arts to go to reading because of the grading. She was a traditional teacher, and she tried to do the non-traditional route, which is what we're doing. She said, 'All I did was grade papers, and I can't do that anymore. I can't give this much to my kids, but I'm not going to do it wrong either, so I'll go over there. (I-3, p. 13)

Even though the grading may be challenging, the participants have enjoyed teaching grammar in context. Molly feels very positive about her teaching of writing and has been searching for new ways to teach grammar since she began teaching:

> I guess it would be getting my teaching certificate and realizing that I could make an adventure out of teaching grammar in the context. It didn't have to be this really cut and dried dull thing that I had experienced in seventh grade because I had found it pretty rote, and I had done a little bit of reading about grammar on my own and enjoyed that. (I-1, p. 5)

She said that teaching grammar makes her uneasy, "In the sense that it's a challenge to teach grammar effectively, but in a good way. I kind of think I'm looking at in a challenging but interesting way" (I-2, p. 6).

Jennifer learned some innovative techniques in her undergraduate education courses. She likes the way she teaches most of the time but sometimes still questions her methods because she is only in her second year:

> I try to do grammar in the context of writing, but as a second year teacher, I find that I get swamped sometimes with all this stuff that I have to do. So every once in a while I do rely on the book to get me through some weeks or days or whatever. But typically, it is in the context of writing. (I-2, p. 4)

Violet sees herself as a writing teacher and believes there are tremendous benefits to teaching grammar in context:

> I actually thought the benefit to me is that I enjoy teaching. I don't enjoy doing things the other way. I felt like I was copping out. It was time for them to do it, and I would sit back and say 'What do I do now?' Should I be at my desk; should I be walking around; what should I be doing? Whereas, when I teach writing or grammar in the context of writing, I'm busy the whole entire day. (I-3, p. 8)

Mark enjoyed the course on teaching grammar in the context of writing. He said that he is searching for innovative ways to make grammar interesting to his students:

> I would really like to find ways to teach it [grammar] in the context of writing and to really make it relevant to what they're doing, to who they are, to what their beliefs are, to what they want to achieve, to show them how they can achieve better writing through grammar, with grammar, knowing grammar, knowing the components, having that toolbox firmly within their grasp. (I-3, p. 4)

The teacher participants believe that the teaching of grammar and language arts is changing. They believe that teaching is moving away from rote memorization and traditional exercises toward the teaching of grammar in context. Violet believes, "Right this minute there is a big shift toward writing in all disciplines" (I-1, p. 10). Even though she is teaching writing and trying to teach grammar in context, she has found it difficult finding resources for teaching grammar in context. She said of her college professors,

> Nobody has taught me how to teach it [grammar] in writing. They had taught me not to teach it the way it was taught, but they couldn't tell me how to teach it. They just said, 'Oh, Noden's real good; Atwell's real good; Weaver's real good; but no one ever showed me what to do. (I-2, p. 11)

She would like to have a text that focuses solely on teaching grammar in context. As she looked through textbooks and supplemental materials, she did not find what she needed, "Literally, like I said, 98% of the book is traditional. You might get 2% at the back that

actually does the editing and the revising and the stuff you need – how to make a writer better" (I-3, pp. 7-8). She said of teachers, I think when the new teachers come in, it's so very easy to be switched. But I think when traditional teachers change, somewhat, and keep the traditional that works and add the new stuff that works, too, and combine it and make something even stronger, that's when the difference is made (I-3, p. 7.).

Mark believes that teachers are moving away from traditional teaching because of technology:

> I think the way content is taught is changing. When I grew up, we had the textbooks, and that was it. We didn't have enough computers to go around. We didn't have a lot of technology, but now technology is really widening media, modes of communication, the information gap. I think a lot of teachers are moving away from just simple textbook teaching. (I-2, p. 9)

Jennifer wishes she had learned the way she teaches, "I wish that as I learned grammar, it would have been more applied sort of grammar…. I wish we had done more of a study of why we study grammar, not let's study it for the sake of studying it, but let's give some sort of context for studying it (I-3, p. 1). Jennifer's philosophy is, "I need to know that what I'm doing in my classroom is what's best for my students" (I-2, p. 9).

Teacher Reported Resources of Grammar Knowledge

The third research question was as follows: What are teachers' reported sources of knowledge for grammar and the teaching of grammar in English language arts? I asked the teachers about two areas of resources. First, what were the resources that teachers remembered using when they were learning grammar? I also asked who taught them grammar, when they learned grammar, and how they learned grammar. Second, I investigated resources the teachers used currently in their classrooms: Where do they get information about grammar and the teaching of grammar? In the section that follows, I

present findings on both the teachers' reported sources of knowledge for learning grammar as well as their reported sources of knowledge for teaching grammar.

Sources of Knowledge for Learning Grammar

This section gives reflections teachers had about their own learning of grammar. Sometimes they said it was hard for them to remember their experiences because they occurred so long ago, but each participant remembered something about who taught them grammar, when they learned, and the methods that were used. Each participant also talked about writing and grammar's connection to writing.

Early experiences

Melinda associated learning grammar with her earliest reading experiences with her mother when she read, "picture books with my mom" (I-1, p. 1).

Grammar was always very important to Emily because of its connection with her family. She remembers when she was small, "My mother was always correcting my grammar: 'You can't say this; you can't say, 'her and so and so would go, but she would go.' My mother was always correcting me, as early as three or four" (I-1, p. 1). She believes that she learned grammar from her parents:

> From my parents, number one, listening to them and just feeling the correct way to say things because my parents always talked correctly, and probably, cognizantly, more so when I started teaching than just going through school with it because I can't remember them ever saying, 'What is the subject; what is the predicate?'(I-1, p. 1)

In elementary school, Emily remembered having spelling tests and believes that she may have learned grammar: "I'm sure we had spelling tests. I do remember those. I remember writing sentences, copying them off the board or whatever. Surely they must

have talked to us about this is a noun and this is a verb because somehow I learned that" (I-1, p. 1).

Molly believes that she learned grammar from reading and writing in a holistic way and from the influence of her parents:

> I learned grammar largely holistically from reading and writing. I learned terms for some things, and I suppose I learned a few things I might have been doing incorrectly with grammar, but I really think I learned grammar through reading and writing more than anything. (I-1, p. 1)

She believes that she began learning grammar when her parents read to her as a child, and she began reading at around four or five years of age: "I think I just learned to read holistically from my parents reading to me and from books just being around. My mother taught me to read. I remember being four or five years old and knowing how to read" (I-1, p. 1).

Although Mark said that his first memory with grammar was in middle school, he also talked about his parents' influence on his learning of grammar: "In terms of grammar, I would say that I was influenced by the way they [his parents] spoke" (I-1, p. 1). In another statement, he said that his parents influenced him, "indirectly because they both practiced Standard English in the household" (I-1, p. 4).

Jennifer's answers to the questionnaire best expressed how she learned grammar:

> I learned grammar and syntax as I was growing up. My parents both read to me on a regular basis, and my mother would often correct my grammatical errors. Thus, I learned without realizing I was learning…. My most negative memories of grammar instruction are set in the classroom. For years, my teachers taught the same way – directly from the book and workbooks. (Q, p. 2)

When Jennifer talked about elementary school, she described traditional grammar instruction:

> Workbooks, workbook sort of thing. It was basically, we would get a lesson about diagramming a sentence or a part of speech or something like that, and then we would be given a list of exercises…. It's funny, because every year, it was just the same. It was just a different face on the teacher, but it was pretty much the same sort of stuff, and it was even the same information, and I never got it. (I-1, p. 2)

Direct instruction in middle school, high school, and college

Melinda said that she did not remember studying grammar in elementary school but did remember studying it in middle school and remembered learning it through, "memorization, drills, and worksheets" (Q, p. 1):

> I can remember my eighth-grade teacher, and I can remember what we called dissecting the sentences. We didn't diagram, but we actually picked out all the different parts of the sentence. So that's where I got grammar. I thought she was hard. She was very strict, very old school, and we did grammar, on grammar, on grammar. I don't remember writing. I just remember grammar. (I-1, p. 1)

She felt that she learned grammar in eighth grade, "I learned all the grammar that carried me through high school during my middle grade school years" (Q, p. 1), and she was comfortable with her knowledge of grammar: "I always felt like I knew grammar. In - grade, I felt like I understood that. Grammar just seemed to give me a system of rules to follow. I can do that. I never felt like I couldn't do grammar" (I-1, p. 8). Middle school grammar was, "constant drills and identifying the function of each word in the sentence," (Q, p. 2), but in high school it was, "composition only" (Q, p. 2). Her writing connection began when she was in high school.

Emily didn't remember her middle school English teachers, but she did remember one of her high school teachers:

> She was really going into the whys and wherefores of writing, I think…. We did have grammar, but, again, I don't remember if she gave us worksheets…. I don't remember a lot of specifics of my school years as

> far as English is concerned. I do remember it was called English, and they taught me how to write a sentence. (I-1, p. 2)

Molly remembers receiving some direct grammar instruction in seventh grade and disliking it enormously,

> As far as learning terms of grammar and learning how to do things like diagram sentences or conjugate verbs, that began to happen in seventh grade. It didn't happen at again in high school as I recall…. Seventh grade, I remember doing a lot of pretty intensive grammar. I hated it, quite honestly. I didn't like it all at that point. I think I felt cheated because I wanted to be writing. (I-1, p. 2)

She recalled the methods used in seventh grade: "I do recall memorizing lists of pronouns in textbooks, but I remember disliking it and feeling that it wasn't helpful. I learned grammar from reading and writing, really" (Q, p. 2). Her seventh-grade grammar instruction left a lasting impression on her:

> I just keep thinking about all those pronouns in seventh grade. For some reason, I really remember thinking why do need to know that this is an object pronoun? I felt really frustrated. It's not that I couldn't do it. I just really resented that we were doing so much more of that than we were of writing. (I-1, p. 6)

Molly also took a grammar course in college, and the instructor used direct instruction. She took a class called "Grammar for Teachers":

> I took a class at [the university] in teaching grammar, well, actually, a couple. One of them I really enjoyed and got a couple of good books through that, but there was another one that was a class in grammar – not teaching it, but just grammar. I really hated the way that class was taught. It was just exercises out of the book. That's really all it was. I don't remember doing anything else in that class. The class was "Grammar for Teachers," but it was not teaching grammar. It was grammar, like a refresher class in grammar. There were things in there that were a little unfamiliar to me here and there. (I-1, p. 5)

Violet didn't recall any grammar instruction in elementary school, "I don't think we did any grammar. I don't think we did any formal grammar because it appeared that

when I was going through pretty much all my school, they were doing a shift to holistic everything" (I-1, p. 1). Violet's educational background varies slightly because she grew up in England:

> What you have to understand is that in England at eleven you take a test. It's called the eleven-plus…. If you passed the test, you went to grammar school, and you were taught formal writing and formal grammar. If you did not pass it, you went to secondary modern school. I didn't even take a grammar class. I took literature, so I was not even taught formal grammar. (I-1, p. 1)

She described secondary modern school as high school: "I went to secondary modern, which is high school, but it's almost like a college track tech prep in an American thought, and if you went tech prep, there was no reason to learn formal writing, and I didn't" (I-1, p. 2).

Mark recalled his experiences with grammar in middle school:

> My first memory of learning grammar is, I think, seventh or eighth grade. I know I learned it before then, but I don't have any concrete memory of it…. We used the textbook primarily. I don't think grammar was taught within writing. I think it was a mini-lesson on usage, a mini-lesson on punctuation. You do the practice out of the book, then we might do a writing project, and you were expected to demonstrate through your writing. (I-1, p. 1)

When he had grammar lessons, Mark remembered traditional teaching: "I remember having to rely primarily on memorization of rules to be successful. We used textbook practice exercises, and the teacher used workbooks" (Q, p. 1).

When Jennifer recalled middle school, she said it was like elementary school, "Like I said, year after year after year, it was just the same sort of written bookwork. I did some writing, but it wasn't in a grammar context. It wasn't with an English class or anything like that (I-1, p. 2).

Maturity and teaching

In addition to reading, influence of parents, and direct instruction of grammar, Emily expressed another way that she learned grammar. She believed that maturity and teaching developed her knowledge of grammar, "I have learned a lot about grammar since I've been teaching it" (I-3, p. 1).

Jennifer also indicated that she had learned by teaching when she recalled difficulty in trying to learn about direct objects, "I mean, things like direct objects and indirect objects. I didn't know the difference between those until I actually had to teach them to somebody" (I-1, p. 2).

Writing connection

Melinda's writing connection. Melinda sees writing and grammar as two separate areas of language arts. All of her comments about writing show this separation; however, she always discussed them together. She remembered studying literature and writing compositions in high school:

> In high school we did a lot of reading. We read a lot of novels, and all I remember is being told to read and write and essay. I never was told how to write a good essay. I was lucky if I got a "C." Sometimes, I was told to rewrite it. All I can remember is reading books and trying to do better, but I was never taught how to write. (I-1, p. 2)

She didn't believe it was grammar that gave her problems:

> I think they wanted more content. I guess, maybe, I wasn't deep enough in explaining what the book was about or something. Not grammar, just the content…. There was really no conferencing going on. You get a grade back. You get a 'C'; you try better the next time. I never really knew why the paper wasn't an 'A.' (I-1, p. 2)

Melinda continued to have problems with her writing when she was pursuing her undergraduate degree,

> When college started, that was a real problem because then I was writing papers, and the first paper I wrote was an 'F.' So I went to another person across the hall who supposedly was good at writing papers. She edited the paper, trying to help me. Then, when I re-turned it in, it was a 'C.' So I guess what I redid was better. She just added sentences, put more words in, and moved things around. I guess it was just the way it was put on paper. She tried to help me rearrange. I just feel like I never got it, never knew. Being told all through high school that it just wasn't good enough, and not knowing why, just kind of felt like maybe you couldn't do it. (I-1, p. 2)

Melinda finished college and went to work in the business arena. Years later, she pursued a second undergraduate degree in education. She believes that maturity played a role in improving her writing. When she wrote papers for her education classes, she found her grades had changed: "I would get comments like, 'Very well written.' I thought, not this person" (I-1, pp. 2-3).

Emily's writing connection. Emily made a strong connection between grammar and writing when she took the Regent's Exam in college:

> I remember thinking if I write it the way I say it, it sounds fine. I guess that's the way. I don't know if the teachers told me that or I just figured that out myself. Of course, when I got to college, I found out that I was wrong about a few things like pronouns and their antecedents. So I learned an expensive lesson. I had to take an extra course. (I-1, p. 3)

She had always believed in her abilities in grammar and writing, and failing the Regent's Exam affected her greatly:

> I was very upset when I didn't pass the Regent's Exam. I could not believe that for my life. I said, 'How in the world could this not be right because it sounded right when I wrote it. That was very life changing for me as far as grammar was concerned, and writing, because it made me realize that something's not right, and I have to analyze more. I think that was probably the turning point for me as far as understanding the uses of grammar and how to use them in my writing. (I-1, p. 5)

She learned many grammar rules when she took the extra course:

> As I recall (that was fifteen years ago), she really went into specifics about every part of speech. She talked a lot about pronouns and antecedents; she talked about subject/verb agreement; she talked about a lot of different things. I can't think of all of them, but I remember thinking that there was a lot more to grammar than I ever thought. It was very traditional grammar education, and I can't remember us doing a lot of writing. I'm sure we did. Come to think of it, we did, because we had to retake the Regent's Exam, and that was what she was preparing us for, so we must have done a lot of writing. (I-1, pp. 3-4)

Molly's writing connection. Molly's connection with grammar and writing is that grammar is a natural part of reading and writing, "I really think I learned grammar through reading and writing more than anything" (I-1, p. 1). She did not recall specific connections through instruction, "I don't recall any real specifics of this. Probably teachers corrected my grammar when grading my writing, but I always did well, and nothing stands out" (Q, p. 2).

Violet's writing connection. Violet said that writing was not an important component of her education except that she remembered writing thank-you letters to her grandparents, "'Dear Grandma and Grandpa, I hope you're feeling well.' We always thanked them for birthday gifts and Christmas gifts, so they were pretty basic once we got it down. We didn't communicate very much with writing" (I-1, p. 4).

When Violet decided to become a teacher, she realized there was a gap in her grammar knowledge: "It wasn't until I went to college that I realized that I had no clue other than the very basic processes of diagramming. I spent many hours writing sentences – just getting through grammar class, and that's the only reason I understand grammar" (I-1, p. 1). She also believes that teaching grammar has helped her to become a better writer, "I think as I have learned to teach grammar to my students, I have become a better writer" (I-1, p. 5).

Mark's writing connection. In middle school Mark had some writing instruction. He recalled that high school lessons were similar to middle school. He remembered having papers returned to him in eleventh and twelfth grades with red marks on them: "That's how the grammar lessons were targeted. I think the teacher would take the papers in and see where we were having the most problems and would target the mini lessons towards those problems. Then, we would have to demonstrate it for the next paper" (I-1, p. 2). Mark also remarked about the grammar/writing connection in college:

> In college, we had one teacher who was a stickler for grammar, and the first paper that I wrote, I didn't really have to think about. I really just addressed the topic and worried more about content, and, at that point, style. I really wasn't thinking about grammar too much, and I didn't get many marks in terms of grammar. So, I thought at that point it had become second nature. Some of the things that I had learned in school had become second nature, especially with comments from my senior year of high school. (I-1, pp. 7-8)

Jennifer's writing connection. Jennifer created a strong connection between writing and grammar,

> Ironically, the time I learned more practical grammar was when I wasn't learning it through direct instruction. My senior English teacher had us writing essays every week, and she was very strict with her grading. As a result, I learned to use proper grammar and mechanics, write a variety of sentences, and remove myself from my writing to help me revise better. (Q, p. 2)

In her interviews, Jennifer talked extensively about her high school English classes.

> I didn't really develop my grammar as deeply as I know now and internalize it until, I guess, eleventh, but mostly twelfth grades, when I came full circle and knew this is why. In twelfth grade, particularly, I was in honors English class, and the teacher was preparing us for the AP exam, and part of the AP exam is an essay portion, and it's timed…. It was boot camp. Every week we had an essay, and it was an hour long…. She would take us through mini-lessons that would help us…. All of our

> grammar instruction came from her…. So, it helped my writing and gave my confidence a boost. (I-1, p. 4)

Jennifer believes that grammar was "evolutionary" (I-1, p. 8), and, " It never sort of clicked. But I knew what I knew, and as I moved through my school years, I was able to pick up more along the way and add that to my knowledge, or change what I knew to get me where I am today (I-1, p. 8).

Sources of Knowledge for Teaching Grammar

> *"I remember walking in my first year thinking, 'Good Lord, what am I going to teach and how do I teach it? Where do I start?" (Jennifer, I-2, p. 7).*

The resources that the teachers credited with their personal knowledge of grammar are not necessarily the same resources that help them with their teaching of grammar. They reported finding information from the Internet, books, other teachers, college classes, and professional development classes. This section focuses on the grammar resources the participants indicated that they currently use in their classrooms as they teach grammar.

The internet

The teachers in this study were Internet-savvy. They used lesson plans that teachers posted on the Internet and websites that other people recommended or that they found on their own. Mark has searched on the Internet for lesson plans, "As a first year teacher, I think the resources that I've found online have made it much easier" (I-2, p. 14). He said that the best online plans are,

> Online lesson plans that think outside the box totally, resources that really blend humor with some of the drier parts of grammar, lesson plans that incorporate other kinds of tools like Legos, more physical types of things like kind of what we did with those sentence strips, and the visual tools, magazine articles, Internet resources, graphics. (I-3, p. 6)

Jennifer thought resources on the Internet and other teachers were very helpful to her, “And, also, then the Internet is just a great tool. I’m so glad these teachers have the time and the will to put this stuff on the Internet. Otherwise, I’d be lost” (I-3, p. 11).

Sometimes teachers recommend websites to Melinda, “I get emails from teachers like that: Here’s something great; maybe you want to look at this; I ran across this on a website; maybe you want to look at this” (I-3, pp. 10-11). She uses Internet technology to find information to enhance her teaching:

> Well, when you try to find great ideas, you really have to work for it. I mean, you have to spend time talking to people, you have to go search on the Internet, and you end up finding pieces of little things everywhere, and you kind of make up your own thing that’s great. (I-3, p. 11)

For CRCT preparation, she accessed the state website for questions to use in her classroom, “Off the state CRCT, you know the OAS, and I got the old tests as well, the 2001-2002” (I-2, p. 1). She also uses the textbook as a resource, “Look in your textbook for the topic that you missed” (I-2, p. 1).

Molly uses the Internet to access professional list serves, “There are a couple of professional list serves that I belong to that have been helpful and interesting. And there’s some good books out there” (I-2, p. 7). She also finds lesson on websites and modifies them for her classes. One of her shared lessons was from the Internet.

Books

Emily’s resources include *Daily Grams*, “I have *Daily Grams*, which is a book of just sentences” (I-2, p. 3). She also said that she teaches from the textbook. She mentioned the Shurley Method,

> One of my students asked if I had ever done the Shurley Method. I said, ‘No, I’ve never heard of it.’ She said, ‘Oh, you sing songs and you learn all this stuff.’ I said if it was that good, I would look into it, and I did.

> I've never taught it full-fledge, but I've pulled little bits and pieces out of it. (I-2, p. 7)

Violet has been searching through her books for lessons plans on grammar that she can incorporate in her teaching of writing:

> Some of the books tell you why you shouldn't be doing it but don't always tell you what to do. Some of them have too much stuff in them. There are individual lessons, but nothing of a whole. There are too many little pieces. I'm looking for some consistency like what do I do when. So, I'm still looking. This summer, I will look again. (I-3, p. 9)

She found some books that she uses regularly:

> Barry Lane, I find to be wonderful because of his sense of humor. I like his sense of fun…. There's really not one author: Atwell, of course; Weaver, of course; *The Power of Grammar*; and Barry Lane – I've got three or four of his I use. (I-3, p. 10)

She has also found some help from old language arts textbooks:

> I also have found this very traditional book. It was *Help with Grammar*, and it's all about grammar, but the wonderful thing, at the end is editing…. So, I'm looking at grammar books totally different. I find the exercises that edit and not point out, and those are the ones I use…. So, I'm going back to those old grammar books, and there might be five or six pages in 150. You've got to do some background into what you are doing. (I-3, p. 10)

She would love a more comprehensive resource on teaching grammar within the context of writing, "I would actually love to have a book, or several books that truly map out how to teach a kid how to write, what you should do. I also need a book that helps me diagnose what's wrong" (I-3, p. 11).

Other teachers

Melinda is thankful for teachers who share their lesson plans and sees them as her most valuable resource:

> Teachers. As they share. Sharing teachers. Caring teachers. Teachers who care about the children overall and their school overall, not themselves personally. Teachers who don't have egos. Teachers who

> care about making sure the whole populace is doing something great if they find something great. (I-3, pp. 10-11)

Emily coordinates her teaching with other teachers in her department, "Following along with other teachers…. We're going to do a unit on nouns…." (I-2, p. 4). She also said, "Well, I do like worksheets because they're easier. I like examples" (I-3, p. 8). Like Melinda, she also thinks other people are valuable resources: "I don't like to read textbooks as much as I like to talk to others. I get a lot of good ideas from other people, and it sparks my creative thinking" (I-3, p. 7).

Molly is influenced by other teachers, "I've seen how some teachers teach it, and I don't want to teach it that way, just like worksheets…. I'll see negative examples – also positive examples, you know, when talking about it with other teachers" (I-2, p. 6). She has found some teachers helpful, however, "Conversations with other people who are willing to be open-minded and who have good ideas themselves (I-2, p. 7).

Mark learns from other teachers and remembered a classroom he had visited during his preparation to teach,

> I'm thinking about things that I've seen other teachers do at the high school and the middle school level while I was substituting. I was really taken aback by the attention that one of the teachers took. She was a lit-comp teacher. She really designed her class around the multiple intelligences. She was teaching writing and reading and influence of grammar with that kind of background. So, for me that was non-traditional. Who's to say that's not going to become traditional? (I-3, p. 8)

College classes

Jennifer sometimes talked about doing projects in her classroom. I asked her where she found her ideas. She replied,

> I guess I learned them in undergrad and also through trial and error, just sort of what is my goal? My goal is to get my students ready for eighth grade and, eventually, life…. You've got to teach multiple ways. You've

> got to use hands-on stuff; you've got to do visual; you've got to do auditory…. So, I guess I learned it in undergrad, but I kind of formulated it on my own. (I-2, p. 5)

She learned about the methods of Harry Noden, Nancie Atwell, and Vicki Spandel in her undergraduate classes:

> I had English classes, I had education classes, and toward the end, I had English education classes. And I had "Teaching Grammar in the Context of Writing," which was really confusing. I didn't understand that class at all. We wrote, and that was it. It wasn't really a grammar sort of class. She didn't teach us any methods. (I-2, p. 6)

She talked further about the readings from her college class:

> We read *In the Middle* by Nancie Atwell, and we read *Creating Writers* by Vicki Spandel…. I really found the Noden text to be very helpful…. So I guess some of the stuff that I've encountered already or been familiarized with, then I'll go back and really dig deep into them. (I-3, p. 11)

Molly found her first teaching resources when she was in college. She had a class that explored using alternative methods for teaching grammar:

> When I was in college, I was taught not to do it that way [traditional grammar], and we were offered some really interesting kinds of alternate ways of doing it. Sometimes I have gone with some of those things. Other times, I've kind of just done my own thing, tried to adapt it…. The class I took at [the university], as I recall, he actually did, the teacher did actually give us some interesting alternatives. I mean, I think there is probably always room for new ones. I remember thinking, I can do this. We did have some resources like the *Image Grammar* book. We worked with that, and we did have to come up with our own lessons. (I-2, p. 4)

Violet feels that she needs non-traditional resources for her teaching. She took a grammar for teachers class in college, but she is not sure middle school students should be taught grammar:

> I took a grammar class, a grammar for teachers class…, but I'm not sure that helped me either. I think that you truly don't know how to apply it until you're an adult, until you're maybe a senior in high school. I think when you try to teach kids abstract ideas when they're not ready for abstract, they're still concrete. (I-3, p. 3)

Professional development courses

Emily has also found some less traditional resources: “I took a course on writer’s workshop last summer, and that helped me a lot and pointed me in the right direction. Even though I haven’t read Nancie Atwell’s book either, I know the concepts behind it” (I-3, p. 7).

Violet said that the course the participants in this study had taken as professional development was beneficial to her, “I think the workshop was amazing. That certainly gave me some help” (I-3, p. 9).

Mark benefited from a Learning Focus workshop where he said he learned about teaching, “With Learning Focus, one of the first things they will tell you is that learning is a social activity first” (I-3, p. 6). Learning Focus is a staff development program that these teachers’ school system has adopted in order to increase student achievement. He also had ideas from his county orientation,

> I’ve modified lessons and really explored what is out there from other teachers. One of the things that we did for our orientation was to bring in portfolios. We got a hands-on example of what students produced, and that was beneficial. It was not only just the lesson plan, but examples of what students can produce. (I-3, p. 8)

Molly has continued to find resources since she received her undergraduate degree: “Just time, kind of, and being in the classroom more. Staff development has helped. Going to the [local] Writing Project. We talked about it [grammar] some there” (I-2, p. 5).

Concluding Thoughts

The first three research questions fit together nicely because the participants’ definitions are related to their beliefs, and their beliefs are related to how these teachers

learned grammar and how they experienced it. Table 3 illustrates the themes related to the first three research questions. As teachers, the participants have chosen to seek different ways to teach grammar than the ways in which they were taught. They have realized that there may be better ways of teaching grammar, and this realization led them to enroll in the professional learning course, “Teaching Grammar in the Context of Writing.” Chapter Five which follows focuses on the fourth research question for this study: How does a professional learning course on grammar instruction techniques influence teacher beliefs about grammar and the teaching of grammar?

Table 3

Themes Related to Research Questions

Research Question # 1 - Teachers' Definitions of Grammar

Theme	Representative Quotation
Grammar is a set of rules for using language.	Mark: "The definition of grammar I have come to adopt is a set of rules for effectively using Standard English" (Q, p. 1).
Grammar is connected to other forms of literacy: reading, writing, and speaking.	Emily: "I would write the way I speak. How in the world could this not be right? (I-2, p. 5).
Grammar is a communication tool.	Melinda: "I felt I would also have to teach them grammar because I felt they needed to communicate effectively" (I-1, p. 4).
The correct form of grammar is Standard American English.	Violet: "I thought all good teachers need to know how to write and speak correctly to a very high level" (I-1, p. 8).

Research Question #2 - Teachers' Beliefs about Grammar

Theme	Representative Quotation
Standard American English has power.	Jennifer: "As I look at people around me and I pick up little nuisances, I realize the importance of grammar.... Because it is that sort of code of power" (I-3, p. 1).
Grammar must be taught for standardized tests.	Emily: "Is what we're going to teach in the context of writing, is it going to cover that, the CRCT?" (I-3, pp. 9-10).
Teaching using traditional grammar methods	Mark: "It's one thing to have a toolbox. It's another to thing to practice using tools" (I-3, p. 3).
Teaching using innovative grammar methods	Molly: "It didn't have to be this really cut and dried dull thing that I had experienced in seventh grade" (I-1, p. 5).

Research Question #3 – Teachers' Reported Sources of Grammar Knowledge

Theme	Representative Quotation
Personal knowledge	Jennifer: "I learned grammar and syntax as I was growing up. My parents both read to me on a regular basis, and my mother would often correct my grammatical errors" (Q, p. 2).
Knowledge for teaching	Melinda: "You have to go search on the Internet, and you end up finding pieces of little things everywhere" (I-3, p. 11).

CHAPTER FIVE

THE PROFESSIONAL LEARNING COURSE

This chapter relates findings for the fourth research question: How does a professional learning course on grammar instruction techniques influence teacher beliefs about grammar and the teaching of grammar? The participants in this study signed up for the course "Teaching Grammar in the Context of Writing" in their school system. They met one day per week in two-hour sessions for five weeks. I designed the professional learning course based on two of the principles of the National Writing Project: "(1)Teachers are key to education reform and (2) Teachers are the best teachers of other teachers" (Lieberman & Wood, 2003, p. 8). The teachers who chose to attend the course also agreed to participate in a research study on grammar and the teaching of grammar. The volunteers stated various reasons for attending the class, but key to their choosing to attend was the combination of grammar and writing. A sense of camaraderie developed during the first class, and continued throughout the course, as teachers found other teachers who were interested in the same ideas as they were. Some of the teachers were a little hesitant about teaching lessons because they had come to "learn," not to teach. As they understood the concepts, however, they thrived in the shared ideas model of the National Writing Project. They struggled as they searched textbooks, the Internet, and other resources to find the lessons they shared with the group or learning community. In addition to the lessons they taught, they discussed other instructional techniques they

found effective in their classrooms and brought in books, titles of books, and other resources to share with the group.

I interviewed the participants after the course was over, at the end of the school year, when they had had time to reflect on the ideas we shared in our learning community. Some of them had used lessons from the course in their own classrooms, some of them had come up with lessons that extended ideas heard in the course, and all of them reflected on the effects of the course for them as individuals. The first section of this chapter deals with the professional learning course: participants' reasons for taking the course, the camaraderie that developed, and the shared ideas. The second section of this chapter relates reflections after the course: the participants' stated beliefs about the course and their call for additional resources for teaching grammar in the context of writing.

The Professional Learning Course: "Teaching Grammar in the Context of Writing"

Reasons for Taking the Course

The descriptive title of the professional learning course, "Teaching Grammar in the Context of Writing," attracted teachers who were interested in both grammar and writing aspects of language arts. Their stated reasons for taking the course focused mainly on the search for strategies for teaching grammar and for teaching grammar in the context of writing. The teachers stated their reasons for taking the course on a card during the first class; however, occasionally, during interviews with them, they added to their stated reasons.

Melinda's stated reason for attending the course was, "As a new educator, learning new strategies to teach grammar and writing is high on my priority list" (C-1).

During the interview process, I learned that two other members of the class, Violet and Emily, urged Melinda to come, “She [Emily] kept saying, ‘Come with me,’ and I would run into Violet, and she would say, ‘Are you coming?’ So then I knew two people, so I thought, well, why not?” (I-3, p. 8).

Emily had taken a class on writer’s workshop the previous summer and tried to do writer’s workshop at the beginning of the school year. She believes in teaching writing, but she also believes in teaching grammar. She took the course because she is still looking for answers, “I took the course because I believe in grammar as a stepping stone to writing, and I want to know how to best teach it” (C-1).

Molly loves teaching writing but does not particularly like teaching grammar. She hoped to find a way to join the two, “I took the class because I want to become a better language arts teacher, and I’m intrigued by how grammar and writing coalesce” (C-1).

Violet and I had become acquainted at a county level meeting where we aligned the state standards with curriculum. She had this to say about taking the course, “When your class came up, that was a no-brainer to me, especially knowing that it was you, and you had been a traditional teacher and were so excited about not only finding a way to do, but sharing it with other people” (I-3, p. 7). On her card, she emphasized what she wanted to learn, “I took the course to help me integrate grammar: the teaching of writing and grammar” (C-1).

Mark is looking at many ways to teach language arts. He finds resources and changes them to meet the needs of his special education language arts classes. During his student teaching and his first year of teaching, he encountered many teaching styles and

attitudes about language arts, “I took this course because I am interested in finding out what other teachers think about the value of teaching grammar” (C-1).

Jennifer laughed when I asked her about her experiences inside and outside of school. She went into her master’s program shortly after she received her undergraduate degree, “Well, since I’ve never really left school, my experience with grammar is daily” (I-2, p. 2). Being a continuing learner adds to the reason she stated for taking the course,

> Now that I am knee-deep in this teaching “thang,” I need some practical strategies that are going to both engage and teach my students. With so much emphasis on test scores and AYP, very little time and energy is left to develop students as writers. But writing is where we REALLY “grab” them (C-1).

Camaraderie

The NWP principle of teachers teaching teachers creates a bond among the people participating in the course. The participants become more than members of a class; they become a learning community. The comments of the participants in this study clearly illustrate this type of learning community. The participants in this study were excited about finding other teachers who shared their interest in teaching writing instead of traditional grammar. They felt that teaching grammar was necessary, but they wanted to find a better way. By sharing their ideas, they built each other’s confidence and became a support network for each other.

Melinda’s camaraderie began with her two coworkers, Emily and Violet, but became stronger during the course, “I think it’s been more than beneficial because first of all, I’ve met some great teachers and some great sources and people to talk to” (I-3, p.8). She continued to talk about the benefits of the course:

> From my perspective, being new, I mean I just need this stuff, especially like when we shared lesson plans. Everyone had to bring something. Oh,

> yeah, that's a great lesson idea, Oh, yeah. You know, if everybody shares something, even though you don't use it every day, you know, like I had never done a lot of grammar in writing, but to have to go and try and figure something out helped. I had to come up with a lesson plan. Maybe it wasn't the greatest thing, but it was something that I thought, well, maybe this will work, and they'll share with me whether it will work. (I-3, p. 8)

Emily shared ideas frequently in class. She wants to teach more writing but is very hesitant. Talking about the course, she said it helped her, "And your course. And listening to people talk. Violet has been a great resource for me, and she's pointed me in the right direction a lot of times" (I-3, p. 7).

I met with Violet for our second interview during April, after the course had ended, "I miss our weekly rendezvous. I think that I have been to many many many workshops, and they've been useless, but I've got to say, I learned a lot" (I-2, p. 1). When she thought about the classes, she thought of teacher collaboration, "We really got into it. It's teacher collaboration, and it goes beyond just the workshop" (I-2, p. 1). When she thought about this type of course in a larger group, she did not think the camaraderie would be as great, "I don't think it would be anywhere near as intimate. I think we wouldn't, I think we bonded. I think some of it was that. I think a larger group, it would become more of a college class, and that wasn't a college class" (I-2, p. 12). During her third interview, Violet continued to talk about the benefits of the class, "I think just being able to talk about it helps. Going to the workshop, oh my gosh, talk about helping confidence" (I-3, p. 13), and "It's nice to know there are other people out there with the flag flying high trying to do different things. It's very hard when so many of the teachers around you don't believe in what you're doing still" (I-3, p. 5).

When Molly reflected about the experiences in our course, she believed that working with other teachers on the concept of grammar helped reinforce her beliefs about teaching grammar and writing, "It's also been good to see other teachers dealing with the same issues that I am. And that has made me feel less isolated in some ways. I have felt somewhat isolated in terms of how I look at grammar and language, to some extent" (I-3, p. 4).

Mark, also enjoyed the camaraderie,

> I'm very happy to see that there are teachers who are willing to be critical about the way that grammar has been taught and to really find ways that make it fun and make it relevant to students…. I'm excited to see what I come up with and to see what other teachers come up with. I'm excited to see a teaching work force that is willing to share. You know, I think that is going to be key to having a setting that is really conducive to student learning. (I-3, p. 9)

Jennifer enjoyed finding other teachers who were like her. She had only found one in her current school, her mentor, so this course meant a stronger support network:

> I really have enjoyed that class. In fact, I wish the class could have been longer. It was so nice to have a small group who are in the same boat as I am but who all had brilliant ideas of their own. And we were able to have that round table discussion and bounce ideas off each other and steal ideas from each other. It was nice. It was so much more than like any mentor group or anything like that. That was sort of that little boost that I needed to get through the rest of the year. (I-2, p. 6)

She also appreciated the variety of ideas she heard during our meetings. She felt that everyone in the group, regardless of their number of years of teaching, had something valuable to share and gain:

> I kind of thrive on that colleague discussion and peaking into, you know, other people's rooms and seeing what they're doing. In fact, we were talking about CRCT prep, and I just grasped those ideas and just thought they were great. So, yeah, I enjoyed the discussions; I enjoyed the variety of perspectives, you know, because everybody had a different experience. They were at a different places in their teaching. They all had valuable

> information. Even the youngest who just got out of college could say, well, wait a minute this is the theory. Then the experienced could say, this is my experience, and we could bring it together and sort of make it – come up- with this compromise sort of thing. (I-3, p. 3)

Shared Ideas and Lessons

One principle of the NWP is that the best teachers of teachers are teachers. In this five-week course, each of the participating teachers taught one or more lessons on teaching grammar in the context of writing. They used the books that I gave them in the course, resources they had in their classrooms, and the Internet. The assignment was to try the lesson in their classrooms and then teach our learning community so the other teachers could take it back to their own classrooms. Each teacher taught one lesson, but three of the teachers prepared two lessons in order to have at least two lessons per week. In addition to the lessons the participants prepared, they also shared other ideas during class discussions. This section gives lesson plans the teachers shared during the classes and other lesson ideas that they shared during classes and interviews. It also has comments teachers made about lesson plans they took from the course and tried in their classrooms.

During the first week of the five-week course, I taught a lesson on sentence combining and gave the participants the texts we would use for the course. We discussed a list of definitions of grammar used by individuals and researchers that I had prepared for the class (see Appendix C). We also discussed research into the teaching of grammar and looked at the sections of the Schuster text and the Weaver text used in the class that dealt with the research. We read the syllabus (see Appendix D) and assigned weekly lessons. Molly and Violet volunteered to teach lessons on sentence parts and sentence fragments during the second week. Violet and Jennifer taught the third week; Molly and

Mark taught the fourth week; and Melinda and Emily taught the last week. Emily taught two lessons because she had to miss class on the fourth week. Some of the lessons were short while others were lengthy. I give summaries of the shared lesson plans in the following paragraphs.

The second class focused on teaching sentence parts and sentence fragments. Violet's lesson incorporated some traditional elements and some teaching in context. She began the lesson by asking the teachers to write a journal entry on any topic or on her selected topic, "a dilemma." After several minutes of writing, she went around the table asking the teachers who and what their topics were. She then asked if the teachers remembered her two questions and said, "Sentences are always split into two totally different sections. Usually we talk about subjects and verbs. I'm going to give you some different vocabulary" (PLC-2, p. 2). She went over the definitions of fragment and subject. She showed the class a chart with sentences and led a discussion of the various parts. This part of the lesson was more traditional in format, but it was a mini-lesson in the middle of two writing activities. After the discussion of terminology, she had the teachers write one very simple sentence, with no prepositions, on a sheet of paper. She had the teachers trade papers, highlight the complete predicates, and underline the subjects. Next, she said to add information to the simple sentence, "Put some meat on these bones, not too many; just add one or two because we're going to trade again" (PLC-2, p.2). The teachers traded papers, highlighted the predicates, and underlined the subjects again. They enjoyed the activity. She had the teachers trade papers again and repeat the previous procedure. She told the group, "If you can add to this one, you can. If you need to start over, you certainly can, and you can write whatever kind of sentence

you want this time. Let's try and make it more difficult this time" (I-2, p. 3). After all of these steps, she continued her lesson by explaining that the reason she was teaching this was that she wanted her students to read each sentence when they revised their papers As a follow-up lesson, she has her students go back to their journal entries and look for fragments. Violet told me at the beginning of the class that she had a difficult time coming up with her lesson, but she incorporated all of the elements I had asked her to put into preparing the lesson. She was using grammar elements while teaching writing, she tried out the lesson with her class before sharing it, and she involved the other teachers in actually doing the lesson.

Molly also gave a lesson on sentence fragments and sentence parts during the second class. Molly showed examples of student work for her lesson plan. She told the class that she has students go through magazines and newspapers looking for sentence fragments. When they find the fragments, they write them down on notebook paper and then turn them into complete sentences. She has the students put them on overheads, and then her class examines them and discusses the difference between the fragments and the complete sentences. They discuss the effectiveness of fragments and sentences in different types of writing. This lesson did not use textbooks or any traditional formatting but still covered the elements of sentence fragments.

During the third class, the assigned reading and lesson plans covered run-ons and comma splices. Violet prepared a lesson plan for this class that incorporated writing. She had cut construction paper into strips. She had the teachers work with a partner to write two sentences. One of the sentences had to be a compound. The teachers wrote one clause per strip and put conjunctions and commas on separate strips. She said that

the class was going to look at two kinds of errors that she frequently finds in her student writing. We laid the clauses, punctuation marks, and conjunctions out on the table to form sentences. She instructed,

> The first thing I want you to do is remove your conjunction. You now have a comma splice. What that means is that you have an independent clause and an independent clause. Everybody hold up your conjunction. That's the missing piece. Now, everyone remove the comma you had before the conjunction. Now what you have is a run-on sentence because you have two independent clauses without the correct punctuation. (PLC-3, pp. 3-4).

She continued her lesson by showing a visual of a comma splice. She had taped two pieces of paper together to represent wires – a splice. She had a cross-curricular connection with the next part of her lesson plan. She handed out paragraphs she had copied from the science textbook, "I copied these from the science book, but I made mistakes. Go on the hunt, and when you find one that is not correct, correct it" (PLC-3, p. 4). For homework, she told her students to take a previous writing assignment and take out some of the punctuation. The other teachers enjoyed this hands-on lesson.

Jennifer presented the second lesson on run-ons and comma splices. Jennifer said she usually uses her LCD screen to project pictures when she does this type of activity, but during our class, it would not work, so she printed individual pictures. The lesson worked very well with individual pictures, and the class discussed where to find pictures that they could use for this type of activity. She told us to write descriptive paragraphs using the pictures as prompts. She gave us a paragraph with run-ons and comma splices and asked us to correct the errors. She went over the rules that applied to run-ons and comma splices. She also used the yes/no tag questions from the Noguchi reading. She said that after the students did that, she has them go back to their own paragraphs and

look for mistakes they may have made. She used an example, but she also asked the students to use their own writing for editing. The sample and going over the rules acted as a mini-lesson between writing assignments.

Mark and Molly presented lesson plans on usage during the fourth week. Molly presented a lesson on dangling modifiers. She said that she does a mini-lesson on misplaced and dangling modifiers before she gives her students the handout. She gave us a handout with misplaced or dangling modifiers. She said that she focuses on the unintentional humor that results in modifiers being in wrong locations. She has her students work individually or in pairs. They choose one or two of the sentences and write them correctly. The students illustrate the incorrect sentences on construction paper. They can use markers, clip art, and/or images from magazines and newspapers. They should write the incorrect sentences below the images. They punch holes in the top of the pictures and "Suspend the images from the ceiling, thus creating a display of dangling modifiers" (PLC-4, p. 1). She said that she was going to extend the lesson through a writing activity:

> What I'm going to do with them [the students] after this is I'm going to have them write the beginning of a story. Maybe even write a short narrative using the ideas on these, and they can either have them be crazy somehow, have them be kind of a fantastical thing, or they can use the correct sentence and write the beginning of a story. (PLC-4, p. 1)

The other teachers laughed hilariously as they read the sentences. We examined samples of student work that Molly brought.

Mark taught his lesson during the fourth class. He found his idea online and adapted it. He prefaced his lesson by reviewing subject/verb agreement with the class, "I placed a couple of examples on the board, and I told them to match these and see how

many ways they could combine them" (PLC-4, p. 3). He said they were reluctant to combine some of them because they did not make sense, but they were correct combinations. He gave the students a list of rules to use for reference and introduced a process he found called the "Five Step Process" (PLC-4, p. 3).

During our class, he described the process of handing out strips of paper to students. They looked for various kinds of sentences in their AR books or their textbooks. He had the students write the subject fragment on one strip and the predicate fragment on another strip. They put the subject strips in one box and the predicate strips in another box. He went around the room and had students pull out one strip from each box. If the subject and predicate didn't match, "They're forced to change the verb. They might be funny, but they're forced to change the verb" (PLC-4, p. 4). As a follow up for the lesson, he suggested, "Then as an extension, you could use newspaper articles or magazine articles. I told them they would find these [fragments] more often in dialogue" (PLC-4, p. 5).

On the occasion Mark taught this lesson, I was able to observe the lesson in his own classroom. The students enjoyed combining the sentences. The usage element of this lesson was subject/verb agreement. This lesson also served as a review of subjects, predicates, and sentence fragments. When the subjects and verbs did not agree, the students knew how to correct them. The lesson incorporated using literature to search for sentences. The writing element related to the editing process or recognizing agreement problems.

Emily and Melinda provided lessons on punctuation on the fifth and last week of the professional learning course. Melinda's lesson plan was on when to use an

apostrophe to show possession. She said that she got the lesson online. She began the lesson by describing using a yo-yo in her class, "My hook was – my model – I've got my yo-yo. The first three kids in the room have yo-yos, and the other kids are getting all excited" (PLC-5, p. 1). She gave each pair of teachers a bag with items in it. The pairs, or groups, used the objects in the bags to write a short possessive noun skit (similar to the model) that included one singular possessive, one plural noun, one plural possessive, and an irregular plural possessive. The students wrote and produced the skits.

Emily presented two lessons on the last night of the class. The first lesson was on the importance of punctuation in writing:

> This is an activity that I did with my higher class. I had my kids take out two pieces of paper and write a paragraph. You may write about anything. Please do not punctuate it, and when you come to a new sentence, don't capitalize. What I had my kids do was write it correctly the first time and then rewrite it incorrectly…. Now, what I'd like for you to do is trade papers and punctuate and capitalize as you believe it should be. The point I was trying to make is that you have to have some direction when you're editing. (PLC-5, p. 4)

She had the teachers in the class do the activity. Someone asked Emily how she graded this activity. She said that she didn't grade it. She said that she has students give the papers back to the people who wrote them, and they check to see if the paragraphs were punctuated to indicate the intended meaning.

Emily took her second shared lesson from Nancie Atwell's *Lessons That Change Writers*. She borrowed Lesson 71 on punctuating conversation. There is a brief history of punctuation marks, a listing of rules, and a paragraph to punctuate. She said that she teaches the students to say, "The teacher said" (PLC-5, p. 5) and called it "speaker tag."

In addition to the lesson plans that the teacher participants presented on their assigned weeks, they sometimes shared other lesson plans and talked about how they

were using each other's plans in their classrooms. Molly shared some of her ideas about teaching verbals, "I think there are ways you can make participles, using participles, that can facilitate stronger writing with them, and I have been looking for strong ways to do that (I-2, p. 1). She said that she makes up some of the sentence samples she uses, but she also uses student writing, "I use some of their student examples, too…. If they made sentences, I'll pull them out of there and write a verbal phrase that's a gerund and write, or with complements, that kind of thing, too" (I-2, p. 2). She talked about using student writing for examples, "Putting student examples of writing, with their permission, on overheads and pointing out those strong examples of compound-complex sentences, positive examples, and negative example (I-2, p. 4). She also said that she plans to use some of the shared lessons in her class, "We're looking at some of the things that we're doing now. I haven't done many of them, but I will" (I-2, p. 2).

During several classes, Molly talked about a lesson plan she was developing for CRCT preparation. She had her students create questions for a scavenger hunt. The students were taking their questions from their textbooks or from the CRCT questions online. She shared other writing lessons with the group. She talked about a competitive way she teaches complex sentence parts. She uses the students' writing to identify elements of sentence structure, "They did what we call a bee. Like the first person said, this is a subordinate clause of the sentence. The second person said, it acts like an adjective, noun, or and adverb. The third person tells what it modifies or how it functions as a noun" (PLC-1, p. 3).

Melinda tried a lesson in her classroom that another member of our community suggested,

> I do remember I did something with writing. I remember Violet said try having the children start the sentences with a different word. It didn't quite work like I thought it would work because it didn't force them to always put the prepositions in front of a dependent clause. (I-2, p. 2)

Mark said that he was planning on trying an idea offered by Violet, "I'm going to try to write the paragraph or a page without using the same word at the beginning of sentences and see what that does" (I-2, p. 8). During informal discussions, Violet talked about this idea during our second class.

Jennifer had tried some of the lesson plans we had talked about in class. During one interview, she talked about a lesson she did based on the sentence combining lesson I taught during the first class,

> I said, write three sentences down. Now, give me a simple sentence, and they gave me a simple sentence, and we combined them and we made compound sentences, and then we made complex sentences. And I said, this is a subordinating clause. That means that this clause is, you know, and I sort of run through it. (I-2, p. 5)

Concluding Thoughts on Shared Ideas and Lessons

The assignment for each participant was to find or create a lesson plan using grammar in context, use the lesson plan in her or his classroom, and share the lesson plan with our professional learning community through hands-on activities. Throughout the presentation of the lesson plan, the community was to discuss the effectiveness of the lesson plan. The participants were all successful in following the assignment, but some of the lesson plans were more innovative than others were. Violet, perhaps, showed the most creativity in that she prepared two lesson plans on her own. She used the books from our course as well as books she had in her classroom. She used her acquired knowledge to create a unique visual of a comma splice. Parts of her lessons were traditional exercises, but she used these as mini-lessons. This use follows the advice of

Constance Weaver (1996) who recommends the use of mini-lessons for teaching basic grammar concepts. This use also coincided with Violet's philosophy that we need to use both traditional and innovative methods to teach grammar.

Jennifer also created her lesson plan based on methods she had learned in her college classes and tried in her classroom. Jennifer's lesson plan and Molly's used visuals. The learning community really enjoyed working with visuals for writing assignments. When I participated in the summer workshop of the NWP, several of the ideas I enjoyed the most were visuals. The idea of combining a writing assignment and a grammar concept in a visual method created excitement for the group. It is innovative in that it is not skill and drill exercises and it uses multiple sensory mechanisms.

Some of the participants were reluctant to create their own lesson plans and chose to borrow from other sources. The lessons that they borrowed and shared were lessons that focused on teaching grammar in context; however, they changed the lessons to meet the needs of their classrooms. In this case, the teachers were diligent in their search for innovative lessons. My concern is that there are many lesson plans on the Internet, and not all of them are innovative.

Reflections on Professional Learning

After the professional learning course, when the participants had gone back to their classrooms, I emailed them each week to ask if they had taught grammar in any way during the week. Some of them did not respond, and some of them told me they were not teaching grammar. They told me they were preparing for the CRCT or teaching writing. Two months later, I interviewed all of the participants for the third time. Two themes

emerged from these final interviews: attitudes about teaching grammar within the context of writing and a call for resources to assist them in their teaching.

Attitudes about Teaching Grammar within the Context of Writing

The teachers reflected on the course and discussed their attitudes about teaching grammar in the context of writing. Jennifer enjoyed the course, "Thanks for a great class! I was so glad to meet new people who had brilliant ideas, and I learned such great techniques and ideas to teach more effectively than my teachers" (Q, p. 3). She had ideas she was trying in her classroom, but she was searching for tangible things to use in her classroom:

> Oh, yeah. In fact, that's really where some of my tangible ideas began to take shape. I mean, I had some ideas of my own, but they were all in these huge big projects, the global sort of this is the big picture, not let's narrow it down. And the class that we took really helped me narrow it, you know, and make these mini lesson concepts a reality because the ideas we came up with were not we're going to do this huge project kind of stuff. (I-3, p. 3)

"The exposure of teaching grammar within writing has opened my classroom to more exciting lessons. The students will return the grammar learned through application" (Q, p. 3), Melinda stated. She talked about ideas she would like to try, "What I'd like to do is present a journal and give them four words, trying to teach writing with grammar and let them learn concepts like predicate adjective, predicate noun, subject complements, and something totally different that doesn't apply" (I-2, p. 3). She finds herself thinking of new teaching techniques frequently, "How am I going to teach prepositional phrases and what they modify within writing? How am I going to teach, you know, just put it within writing, ask myself that question, that's what I'm going to do" (I-2, p. 11). She made a similar statement on another occasion, "I'm constantly

thinking how can I teach this through writing, a more exciting way? How am I going to organize next year to make sure I'm doing a lot more writing when I teach grammar?" (I-3, p. 7). Her last comments concerned her goals, "Well, in parting, my goal is to do more grammar in writing. And I'm going to make a promise to myself to read my research books, and I think I'm going to try to look more on the Internet about what research says" (I-3, p. 12).

Violet already teaches writing in her classroom. She doesn't believe in teaching the amount of grammar that is in the curriculum, but she sees the value of teaching grammar in the context of writing, "I'm still struggling with how to make it work. It's that simple for me; although, your class has made a huge difference. So, I'm excited for next year…. Oh, I felt that was one of the best workshops we've been to, really useful for me" (I-2, p. 12). She thinks for herself, "I've got some real research to do to see how to do it right, and I've got to take the time to do the research. But now I'm on a quest. Now I know what I want, so I think it will be easier. Whereas, as I was just floating" (I-3, p. 3).

Emily believes in teaching grammar in the context of writing, "This whole thing is better, this writing and grammar in writing because it gives them more ownership of it and creativity" (I-2, p. 7). She wants to incorporate more writing in her classroom, "I would like to try. I want to figure a way to make it more meaningful for the students and to fix it so that they can learn how to apply the techniques to their writing" (I-3, p. 4). She sees advantages in teaching grammar in this way, but she isn't sure if all of her students will learn what she wants them to know,

> You're either going to learn it in the writing or you're not. So the advantage, hopefully, they'll all learn it, I don't know. Learning how to

> incorporate it, that's the advantage. They'll learn how to incorporate the rules in their own writing so that they can see the concept at work. They can see it in what they're doing. They can personalize it, internalize it. (I-3, p.4)

For Molly, the greatest benefit from the professional learning course was finding teachers who believed in the value of writing, "The staff development you've done has helped" (I-2, p. 3), and "They've bolstered my sense that the teaching of grammar needs to be a more holistic process and not separate from teaching student writing" (I-3, p. 4). She wants to incorporate grammar in the teaching of writing, "I wish I felt stronger about teaching grammar in the context of writing and really looking at big chunks of student writing more. I tend to still do like sentences and paragraphs more" (I-2, p. 5). She believes teaching writing and grammar together may be the future path of language arts, "I think it is changing. It seems to me that it probably is moving more in the direction of teaching grammar in the context of writing" (I-3, p. 6).

Mark believes of the course, "It just really forced me to think outside the box and how I teach grammar" (I-3, p. 7). He would like his students to experience grammar the ways he experienced grammar during the course, "I think my experiences now I would like for them, the things that I am learning about grammar and the ways that I am learning to teach grammar" (I-3, p. 3). He believes that teaching grammar within writing will benefit his students, "I think they have a deeper understanding of the power of grammar once they've use it in the context of writing, and I think they'll retain it. And I think when it is practiced in the context of writing, it actually becomes second nature" (I-3, p. 6).

A Call for Additional Resources and a Teaching Community That Shares Knowledge of Teaching Grammar in Context

The teachers in this study said they would like more resources to help them begin or continue teaching grammar in the context of writing. It is interesting to note that most of them call for online resources instead of print resources. They also believe that their county school system should provide those online resources.

Melinda feels that it would be helpful to have resources to support teachers who want to teach grammar within writing, "And I think the best thing to have is resources of people that feel that teaching grammar within writing teaches students, first of all, grammar, and teaches them to write, which we want them to write well" (I-3, p. 9). She would like to see resources that would help her in her efforts,

> Say the county said, every teacher, I want one plan to share, and then somebody in technology was in charge of putting that in a website, wouldn't that be great…. Each teacher would have to come up with something, grand idea, but it would have to be emphasizing what you would want to emphasize, you know, if you want to do grammar in writing. (I-3, p. 11)

Emily, like Melinda, would like better resources for teaching grammar in writing. She believes that the county could help in providing these resources, "If the county puts something together online to just draw from as resources, to me it would be so much cheaper and be more beneficial than those textbooks" (I-3, p. 9).

Molly would also like to see more resources, "More community. That's the primary one I think, in the sense of other teachers and connecting with them on a regular basis, maybe through a listserv or something, and having discussions with them about teaching grammar" (I-3, p. 6).

Violet, like the others in the course, would like to see better resources for teaching grammar in writing, “We keep reinventing the wheel instead of using each other. If we gave every language arts department in the county three topics, we could bind the book and divide it between all of us” (I-2, p. 2). She also believed the county could help, “If we gave every language arts department in the county three topics, we could bind the book and divide it between all of us. We have such great minds; why don’t we use them?” (I-2, p. 2).

Mark, like the other participants would like to see more resources for teaching grammar within writing, “One of the things that we talked about that I would like to see is somebody produce something that is specific to our school and our demographic, the scope” (I-3, p. 8). He, like Molly, believes teaching grammar in writing is the future of language arts, “I think we’re going to see it go the way we’ve talked about, grammar in the context of writing. I think it’s because we’re learning more about how students learn, and I think that’s had an impact” (I-3, p. 8).

Jennifer believes a natural extension of our course would be to create a resource for all teachers,

> Taking a variety of experiences, a variety of teaching styles, and then at the same time, the variety of learning styles, and putting them together in the same room and having these ideas flow out, it would be invaluable for a book…. So then, I think that getting together where we’re conference or that forum where we’re getting together and collaborating and putting together our own classroom experiences would be a great tool, not just for the brand new teachers, but for the older teachers who are trying to do a little something different. (I-3, p. 4)

The participants were enthusiastic and believed that they would incorporate the ideas encountered in the professional learning course. This study asked the question: How does a professional learning course on grammar instruction techniques influence

teacher beliefs about grammar and the teaching of grammar? It sought only to explore the teachers' beliefs. The teachers in this study may follow through and use the innovative methods from the class, or they may revert to using the textbook to teach grammar. Finding those answers would require another study.

CHAPTER SIX

DISCUSSION AND IMPLICATIONS

The purpose of this phenomenological study was to explore the beliefs English language arts teachers have about "grammar" and the teaching of grammar by asking the participants to reflect upon information related to their personal knowledge of grammar, articulate their definitions of grammar, and discuss their reported sources of knowledge related to grammar and the teaching of grammar. The study also explored the self-reported effects of a professional learning course on the participants' beliefs about grammar and the teaching of grammar. Participants in this study included six middle school language arts teachers who were selected for the study because they chose to enroll in the professional learning course on teaching grammar in the context of writing and in this study. Data sources included an open-ended questionnaire; three in-depth, phenomenological interviews with each teacher (Seidman, 1998) before, during, and after the professional learning course; teacher artifacts and emails; field notes and transcriptions from videotaped course sessions; and a researcher's log. How do these six middle school language arts teachers' beliefs about grammar and grammar instruction relate to research in the field of English language arts?

Through a process of qualitative data analysis, constant comparative analysis, and phenomenological reduction, several themes emerged. The six teachers defined grammar in terms of rules, correctness, communication, and in relationships with various forms of literacy. They believed in the power of Standard English and that it is necessary to teach

grammar in preparation for standardized tests. They discussed traditional methods and innovative methods for teaching grammar and their sources of knowledge for learning and teaching grammar. When they reflected on the professional learning course, they had positive feedback about the camaraderie and shared ideas in the course, and they also called for needed resources and a stronger sense of community among English language arts teachers in their particular context. This chapter will situate the results discussed in Chapter Four and Chapter Five in the context of research in the field of English language arts. After comparisons of the results in connection to literature in the field, this chapter will also include a discussion of the limitations of this study, as well as implications and recommendations for further research.

Discussion

Constance Weaver (1996) had the following to say about teachers' definitions of grammar:

> When teachers are invited to brainstorm what the term grammar means to them, they commonly produce a list such as this:
>
> - Parts of speech (elements or categories)
> - Syntactic structures (phrases, clauses, sentence types; roles of elements within larger structures)
> - "Correct" sentence structure (subject-verb agreement and such)
> - "Correct" punctuation and other aspects of mechanics
> - Appropriate usage (often thought of as "standard" or educated forms)
> - Sentence sense; style (appropriate and effective use of syntactic options; ability to manipulate syntactic elements). (p. 1)

Weaver's statement is identical in many ways to the way the six teachers in this study defined grammar. Melinda, Emily, and Mark defined grammar as parts of speech, rules to put sentence parts together, and rules for punctuation and mechanics. All of the

participants talked about the "correctness" of grammar, and Violet and Emily stated that "correct" usage indicated a higher level of education, writing, and speaking.

The participants defined grammar in multiple ways. One of the ways they defined grammar was in terms of rules. They believed that grammar includes rules for putting words together in sentences (syntax), rules for using parts of speech, rules for punctuation and capitalization (mechanics). They also specified that these rules apply to Standard American English or Academic English. In addition to Weaver, much of the other research and scholarly writing on grammar highlights an emphasis on rules. For example, Hartwell's Grammar 2 is a descriptive set of rules that linguists use to analyze grammar, but the rules that apply to this study are his Grammar 3, "linguistic etiquette" and Grammar 4, school grammar (Patterson, 2001). Hartwell (1985) said that the rules of school grammar, Grammar 4, replace the rules of Grammar 2 with a "structuralist grammar" that is inaccurate in its representation. Similarly, Schuster (2003) says of rules, "We feel intuitively that grammar is a *system of rules* that are to be followed" (p. xi). Schuster, like Hartwell, indicates that the rules taught in school are not the rules that actually govern language. Instead, the innate rules of usage are replaced by "myth rules." Myth rules are "a host of rules that have accrued through the centuries since the first grammars of English were written and that are now so essential a part of school grammars (or English folklore)" (p. xii) that to abandon them dooms textbooks to failure. He goes on to say that they are rules "that rule no one – other than perhaps a handful of pop-grammarians and hardened purists who look for their authority somewhere in the sky rather than here on earth" (p. xii). Although Hartwell and Schuster point out that the rules taught in schools are not the rules that govern innate knowledge of grammar, the

teachers in this study all believed that the rules of school grammar are important and that students need to have an understanding of those rules.

The six middle school language arts teachers in this study believed that rules are important because using the rules "correctly" allows students to communicate more effectively. The participants said that grammar clarifies, changes, and shapes writing. They also said that a study of school grammar provides a shared vocabulary or terminology. Williams (2003) suggests that teachers do two things in teaching students grammar:

> The first involves raising students' knowledge of grammar to the conscious level. The second involves giving them the vocabulary of grammar. The grammar-writing connection is predicated on the idea that with a conscious knowledge of grammar and the requisite vocabulary, students will be able to recognize grammar and usage errors in their own writing and repair them. (p. 179)

A problem arises, Williams believes, because students do not readily use school grammar knowledge in their composing. When students write, they use the more familiar grammar language of their spoken grammar. Williams (2003) goes on to say, "No amount of direct instruction in grammar can readily reverse these behaviors in children. Indeed, it is very likely that the cognitive operations involved in completing drills and exercises are quite different from those involved in composing" (p. 180). This emphasis on the connections between spoken grammar and composing connects to another way in which most of the participants defined grammar. Molly, Emily, Mark, Jennifer, and Violet each made a connection between grammar and spoken language. Mark and Jennifer specifically referred to home language and its effects on writing and speaking.

Noguchi (1991) warns that public pressure to increase writing skills brings about pressure to teach traditional grammar and, "Yet, in many ways, implementing the

prescribed cure seems more problematic than the alleged disease" (p. 17). The Braddock, Lloyd-Jones, and Schoer's (1963) meta-analysis of research on grammar instruction found that, "The teaching of formal grammar has a negligible or, because it usually displaces some instruction and practice in composition, even a harmful effect on improvement in writing" (pp. 37-38). Hartwell (1985) also stated that the teaching of formal grammar did not affect writing abilities. All of these studies would indicate that the participants' views that teaching grammar has a positive affect on writing are incorrect. Nevertheless, the participants voiced their belief that the "correct" usage of grammar is important. They felt that if students are not taught formal grammar, how would they learn the accepted or standard usage of grammar?

Williams (2003) recommends that students learn usage rules because when people find fault with writing, it is usually in areas that deal with usage. He says that, "Grammar has to do with the structure of language, not with its production. Usage, on the other hand, has little to do with structure but very much to do with production" (p. 180). Williams' statement differs from the ways in which the participants defined grammar because the six teachers in this study frequently defined grammar in terms of usage. The participants did not separate grammar and usage, which Williams describes as a lack of knowledge. Although grammar has specific meanings to linguists, to others (including teachers, people in the business world, newscasters, etc.), grammar may be a generic term consisting of all of the definitions that the participants in this study used. My original statement was that grammar is defined in many ways. For this reason, when discussing grammar, all of those involved in the discussion (especially teachers) must clarify their meanings.

Noguchi (1991) suggests teaching students a “writer’s grammar.” He recommends that teachers not teach grammar for the sake of teaching but to aid in the production of written texts: “Thus, the grammar taught is more selective and, in the end, much more basic” (p. 17). He suggests that grammar be taught within the context of writing, “Ideally, this grammar will be integrated with writing instruction and presented as quickly as possible so that students can use it during revision and proofreading stages of writing” (p. 18).

Many scholars have written texts on teaching grammar in the context of writing (i.e., Constance Weaver, Jeff Anderson, Vicki Spandel, Barry Lane). The teachers in this study believed that their language arts classrooms should focus on writing, but they also felt that grammar must be a part of their instruction. They were searching for ways to teach grammar more effectively and were willing to try innovative techniques such as teaching grammar in the context of writing, but they felt that these newer methods would be more challenging than traditional methods. They needed time to develop expertise in these more innovative teaching methods, and they wanted an opportunity to learn with other teachers.

All of the six teachers said that they had sometimes taught grammar through traditional teaching methods (e.g., worksheets, on grammar or usage, drills on rules, etc.). Although Molly and Jennifer expressed negative feelings about learning through traditional teaching methods, and Violet did not believe that it was necessary to teach traditional grammar, they had all still taught in this manner using textbooks and workbooks on occasion. Emily and Melinda expressed positive feelings toward teaching grammar through traditional methods and said they used the textbook. Indeed, Emily

used the textbook frequently. She has taught the longest of any of teachers – nine years. She was willing to try new methods, but she feared that her students would not have all of the grammar instruction they needed. Although Melinda did not believe that using the textbook was the best way to teach, she felt pressure that she needed to be in accord with her mentor teacher and the other teachers in her department. To help explain the participants' tendencies toward traditional methods for grammar instruction, Weaver (1996) provides twelve reasons why teachers still teach grammar through traditional methods. I will discuss only those reasons that apply to the current study. Chapter Two of this study includes the complete list of twelve. Each of these reasons helps to explain the six teachers' beliefs.

Weaver's first reason why teachers continue to teach grammar through traditional methods is that teachers are unaware of the research, "demonstrating its [grammar's] lack of practical value" (p. 23). The teachers in this study were not aware of the research findings of Hartwell (1986) or Braddock, Lloyd-Jones, and Schoer (1963), but they had all learned somewhere that they should use different methods to teach grammar. Weaver's second reason for teachers' traditional approaches to grammar instruction is that teachers do not believe the research on grammar instruction. I introduced the two studies to the group during the professional learning course. While they did not reject the research, they did not embrace it completely. Weaver's fourth and twelfth reasons that teachers lean on traditional grammar instruction are that they believe that writers and readers need to know grammar for comprehension of texts and that grammar is valuable to writing. The participants in this study believed that students needed to know grammar in order to write effectively in order for others to comprehend their texts. Weaver's sixth

reason that teachers continue to teach grammar traditionally is that traditional grammar exercises are easier to grade. Emily, Violet, and Molly stated that it is more difficult to grade writing than practice exercises. Weaver's ninth reason that teachers use traditional methods for grammar instruction is that they "fear that if they don't teach grammar, students might miss out on something for which they – both teachers and students – will be held accountable" (p. 25). The participants in this study were all fearful that students would not be prepared for standardized tests and that they would be held accountable for their students' scores. Weaver's tenth reason that teachers continue to teach grammar through traditional methods is that they bow to pressure from the community. In this case, all six of the teachers felt pressure from their school communities to teach the way other teachers taught. Weaver's eleventh reason that teachers continue to teach grammar traditionally is that even though teachers believe the research is valid for some, they believe that in other cases traditional grammar works best. Emily expressed the thought that she believes some students learn best through traditional methods, and Violet said that she believes a combination of traditional and innovative teaching methods is best.

Judith Langer (2001), Co-Director of the National Research Center for the Study of English Learning and Achievement, State University at Albany, New York, conducted a long-term study examining teaching practices in schools working to increase achievement for standardized testing. Her findings indicated that students performed best on standardized tests when they learned skills necessary for testing through a combination of three teaching methods: separated, where students examine a particular skill such as a grammar rule; simulated, where students practice a particular skill in a prescribed fashion, and integrated, where students engage in authentic learning activities.

The thoughts of Emily and Violet that students do not all learn grammar through the same methods may coincide with Langer's (2001) research.

During informal discussions of the NCTE Commission on Composition in November 1999, the commission expressed concern that teachers who choose to teach grammar in context often clash with public expectations. They were concerned that teachers would use traditional grammar instruction because of limited time for test preparation and would teach less writing (Allender, 2000). The teachers in the current study felt pressured to teach skills that would be tested on the state standardized tests. They believed that their students must be prepared and that they must make sure they had covered the content, and, more often than not, they felt that the best way to teach this content was through traditional methods. Emily questioned whether teaching grammar in context would cover the standards. Taylor Webb (2005) describes one school system's use of standardized test data to monitor teachers. With the No Child Left Behind Act and its regulations (U.S. Department of Education, 2002), teacher accountability is certainly a valid concern for teachers.

Recently, many researchers have explored the impact of standardized testing on teachers, curriculum, and classroom practices. Angela Love and Ann Kruger (2005) studied teachers' culturally relevant beliefs about African American children in relationship to student achievement. James H. McMillan (2005) explored, "The Impact of High-Stakes Test Results on Teachers' Instructional and Classroom Assessment Practices." He found that teachers used test scores to make changes in their instruction. Cheryl Franklin and Jennifer Snow-Gerono (2005) explored the experiences of teachers with standardized tests in a study that dealt with the accountability factor and how testing

influences curriculum and instruction. Mulvenon, Stegman, and Ritter (2005) reported that test anxiety, although often attributed to students, was felt most by teachers. The teachers in their study reported feeling that student achievement might be used against them when they were evaluated. The teachers in the current study also have their instruction affected by standardized testing. The participants' fears are similar to the teachers in the Mulvenon, Stegman, and Ritter study.

Another prominent theme that emerged in this research was the "correctness" of Standard American English. The six teachers in this study all spoke of using "correct" grammar. They believed that it was important for students to use correct grammar in their writing and speaking. Correctness in writing was usually associated with clear communication. Hartwell's Grammar 3 is what he calls "linguistic etiquette." He also says that linguistic etiquette in writing is really related to "usage." As discussed earlier, many of the problems associated with writing are actually usage problems. In addition to writing, the teachers in this study often associated "correctness" with speaking. Use of "correct" grammar in speaking is also "linguistic etiquette" (Hartwell, 1985). The teachers in the current study reported noticing the "correctness" of others' speech and believed that use of "correct" grammar in one's talk indicates a higher level of education. Standard English is a gatekeeper to social and economic gain. It codifies how the rich and powerful talk and is a way to gain access to power and prestige (Lyman & Figgens, 2005). Lyman and Figgens (2005) defined Standard American English as "a collection of the socially preferred dialects from various parts of the United States and other English-speaking countries." Some researchers say that when teachers view the home languages of students negatively, the student perceives that he or she is viewed negatively, and it

can interfere with learning (Verhoeven, 1997; Freeman, 1982). Goodman (1965) says that if we force a child to use dialect other than the home language for learning that the child is forced to accept himself, his own language, his culture, and his family as inferior. As the teachers in the current study defined grammar in terms of "correctness," they also talked about the power of Standard American English. Ehrenworth and Vinton (2005) believe that teachers must empower their students with the knowledge and norms in our society and that if we do not teach the standards, particularly grammar, we are participating in the marginalization of some of our citizens and not allowing them full membership in society. For Ehrenworth and Vinton (2005), "Teaching students the language of power does not necessarily mean asking them to conform to it. It means giving them the knowledge they will need to make informed and meaningful language choices" (p. 6). Lisa Delpit (1997) points out that if you are not a member of the culture of power, being taught the rules explicitly allows one to gain power. The teachers in this study believed that grammar denotes level of education and socio-economic status. They believed that a correct use of spoken and written grammar – what they termed Standard American English – is important for success in the business world. The National Commission on Writing produced three reports: the first indicated the need to develop a national comprehensive writing policy for schools, the second included corporate views about employees' writing, and the third focused on state governments' views of employees' writing. Business and government employers cited in these reports pointed to the major problem of individuals' lack of writing skills. They reported that they had frequently held workshops to improve employees' writing skills, and mistakes in grammar and usage were major issues in lack of writing skills (National Commission on

Writing, 2005). An article in the *Atlanta Journal Constitution* on Thursday, August 17, 2006, discussed the concerns some business leaders have with poor grammar. These businesses hire outside grammar experts to hold workshops for their companies (Raines, 2006). One of the businesses providing grammar education to companies is The Grammar Sleuth. An interview with the director of the company, Meg Kent (personal communication, September 1, 2006), provided the following information. Kent is a former public school educator and English professor from Northeastern University in Boston, Massachusetts. She founded The Grammar Sleuth in 1988 because she saw a desperate need in corporate America for training in the kind of writing employees do for work. She said that public schools focus too much on the creative aspect of writing and not enough on grammar, thinking skills, and logical order of compositions. Kent emphasized, "We've got to look at what we're educating kids for. These kids have to go to work in the real world." Many of the people she teaches in the workshops received their last grammar instruction in middle school. They are not adequately prepared to write letters, memos, proposals, and reports. Kent believes teachers should emphasize grammar in every grade level and subject from elementary school through college. When asked about teaching grammar in the context of writing, Kent said that she believes students need more practice and that teaching it in context is a shortcut. Gray and Heuser (2003) conducted a survey to see if nonacademic professionals still found the same errors offensive as were reported in the widely cited Hairston (1979) study. Gray and Heuser found that in 2003, professionals found fewer errors offensive than in 1979, but that their list was similar to the Hairston (1979) study, "The most bothersome errors are still nonstandard verb forms, double negatives, object pronouns as subjects, and lack of

subject-verb agreement" (p. 57). Gray and Heuser also include tense switching and misspelling. They indicated that many of the errors marked as "bothersome" were usage errors that held dialectic markers.

In the National Writing Commission report, the respondents to their research said that one place that caused problems in business communication was emails. The participants' lack of care taken in writing, punctuation, capitalization, and spelling disturbed employers (National Commission on Writing, 2005). In the current study, Violet, Jennifer, and Mark expressed concern for the lack of linguistic etiquette in email correspondence. Hartwell's Grammar 3 fits here as well as with written and spoken grammar. Carrington (2005) addresses the issue of "txting" and believes that text messaging is an emergence of new form of text, "with quite explicit skills, social practices, and knowledge associate with it" (p. 171). Carrington says that text messaging threatens accepted classroom practices, but it also offers a new set of practices that our students may use in a modern society. Will this new form of literacy change our future classrooms?

The six teachers in this study firmly believe that instruction in grammar and usage is necessary in order to facilitate their students' progression through school and on into adult careers, as do many scholars in the English language arts field. Researchers in the English language arts field also raise the issues the six teachers raise. The question is not should English language arts teachers teach grammar, but how should they teach it? The participants are ready to try innovative methods, but they have not found the resources they feel they need in order effectively teach grammar in context.

Thus far, I have discussed participants' definitions and beliefs as they pertained to research and publications in the field of English language arts. In the paragraphs that follow, I will focus on participants' reported sources of knowledge and make connections to the professional literature. Melinda, Molly, and Jennifer recalled early experiences of reading with their parents. Emily, Molly, and Mark said they learned grammar by hearing it spoken in the home. These two beliefs stress the importance of home language and early learning experiences. The participants were accurate in their assumptions that they learned grammar in the home environment. Weaver (1996) says, "Before they even enter school, children have acquired a complex set of grammatical structures and a complex set of rules for combining elements into such structures" (p. 33). Hartwell's Grammar 1 is the "grammar in our heads." Hartwell says that it is an internalized set of rules that allows native speakers of a language to use language in an order that makes sense to speakers of the language (Hartwell, 1985).

The participants in this study also recalled learning grammar in the school setting. As discussed earlier, school grammar, or Hartwell's Grammar 4 is not the same as Grammar 1. Hence, there is conflict when students begin to learn the rules of school grammar (Hartwell, 1985). Molly and Jennifer still dislike the rules they had to memorize as students in middle school. Williams (2003) said of school grammar, "[Teachers] might ask why grammar instruction in the third grade is almost identical to grammar instruction in the tenth grade – a sure sign that after seven years of studying the same terms and concepts students still don't get it" (p. 173). Jennifer's comments about learning grammar in elementary and middle school coincide with Williams, "Every year,

it was just the same. It was just a different face on the teacher, but it was pretty much the same sort of stuff, and it even the same information, and I never got it" (I-1, p. 2).

As the participants advanced through the school system, writing became a part of their English language arts course work, and they connected grammar to writing because of the comments and corrections they received on their papers. Weaver (1996) says that, "English teachers have traditionally been encouraged and even trained to *look for errors* in students' papers…. No wonder many students have come to hate writing!" (p. 75). Weaver suggests that there are more constructive ways to respond to errors, such as writer's workshop where students conference with the teacher and work through errors as they improve their writing. Comments, Weaver believes, should be positive and designed to improve content and style. Hillocks (1982) said of his research, "It suggests that teacher comment, when positive and focused on particular aspects over a series of compositions can be effective" (p. 276). Beason (1993) found that, "Positive feedback does not always result in better final drafts, but it plays a vital role in helping student writers recognize their strengths and gain confidence" (p. 411).

Emily, Melinda, Jennifer, and Violet said that their knowledge of grammar continued to develop as they matured and began teaching. The idea that the teacher learns more than the student can be traced back to the 17th century to a Moravian theologian named John Comenius. Other people associated with the idea are Andrew Bell, an English educator born in Scotland, and Jerome Bruner, a 20th century psychologist (Gartner & Riessman, 1994). Gartner and Riessman used the idea of teachers learning as they teach to plan a peer-tutoring group in a New York public school

where they found that students who tutored earned higher grades in the subjects they tutored.

When the participants in the current study prepared their lesson plans for the professional learning course, they utilized the books from professional learning course, but they also used other resources. Mark, Melinda, Molly, and Jennifer chose to use the Internet as a source for lesson plans. The state and county where the study took place offer some lesson plans online for teachers. In addition to those lesson plans, there are many websites, free and subscription-based, that post lesson plans for every subject area. Practitioner journals such as *Voices from the Middle* sometimes provide valuable websites. An example of this would be the list of websites for grammar instructions in an article by Nancy Patterson and Gloria Pipkin (2001) entitled, "Grammar in the Labyrinth: Resources on the World Wide Web." In addition to the Internet, books, and college classes, the participants said that they gained knowledge from other teachers. This is of particular interest because the professional learning course they selected to take was about teachers working with each other to share knowledge.

This leads me to a discussion of the findings for the fourth research question, "How does a professional development course on grammar instruction techniques influence teacher beliefs about grammar and the teaching of grammar?" I modeled our professional learning course on grammar and teaching grammar in the context of writing after the National Writing Project (NWP) model of professional development for teachers. Nagin (2003) suggests, "One reason NWP workshops have been so popular with teachers is that they are led by highly skilled, experienced teachers…. The NWP believes that teachers are professionals who have knowledge to share" (pp. 64-65).

Jennifer expressed this idea of sharing when she said, “I enjoyed the variety of perspectives… because everybody had a different experience…. They all had valuable information, even the youngest who just got out of college (I-3, p. 3). The affects of the professional learning course for Jennifer were twofold. First, through the camaraderie of the class, she found others who were trying to teach grammar in context. She had felt somewhat isolated in her building because she had found only one teacher who shared her philosophy about teaching grammar in context. Second, she found ways to use her ideas more effectively. The camaraderie that developed among the participants is typical of the NWP summer workshops:

> The social practices adopted by the NWP convey norms and purposes, they create a sense of belonging, and they shape professional identities. The teachers we saw enacting the social practices of the NWP surrendered reliance on routine and conventional teaching approaches in order to continuously search for better ways to meet students’ needs, and they saw themselves as conducting this search not only as individuals but also as members of a professional community. (Lieberman & Wood, 2003. p. 21)

In NWP workshops, not only do teachers find other teachers who share the same interests, but they also find teachers willing to share ideas about practices they have tried in their classrooms. The social practices of the NWP allow for sharing of ideas. Lieberman and Wood (2003) identified the following social practices that are present in the NWP model of professional development:

- Approaching each colleague as a potentially valuable contributor
- Honoring teacher knowledge
- Creating public forums for teacher sharing, dialogue, and critique
- Turning ownership of learning over to learners
- Situating human learning in practice and relationships
- Providing multiple entry points into the learning community
- Guiding reflection on teaching through reflection on learning
- Sharing leadership
- Promoting a stance of inquiry

- Encouraging a reconceptualization of professional identity and linking it to professional community (p. 22).

Although this professional learning course on teaching grammar in context was not a summer workshop, by using the principles behind NWP, the teachers in this study were able to experience all of the concepts identified by Lieberman and Wood. When I met with the participants in July, they were still sharing ideas for teaching grammar and writing. When I emailed some of them in August, Emily emailed me back to tell me she was very excited to start her school year with some of the lessons she had gotten from the professional learning course.

Having been a public school teacher for nineteen years, I understand the participants' need for the camaraderie they felt in the professional learning course. Teachers undergo "professional development" constantly. Each year we are bombarded with the latest "fix" for whatever ails our school systems. Unfortunately, the staff development we receive is typically the type where we are taught the latest method and then expected to implement it in our classrooms. The professional learning course based on the NWP model allowed teachers to develop lesson plans that were based on the most current research in their field and that they used in their own classrooms. They were then able to discuss them with other like-minded English language arts teachers. We were able to discuss problems with lessons as well as other lessons that might build on the initial lesson. The teachers were actively involved in their own learning, much the way we need to engage students in our classrooms. This active involvement encouraged discussion and risk-taking. Rather than staying with traditional lesson plans, the teachers saw that they could venture out to more innovative methods.

The teachers in this study saw the value of working with real lessons and with other teachers who shared the joy of teaching English language arts. They were excited to try each other's lessons in their own classrooms. Melinda believed that there were better ways of teaching grammar than those used by her more traditional coworkers, but it was difficult for her to find them. The professional learning course helped her to realize that others shared in her concerns and gave her some direction for finding resources. She said about her planning, "How am I going to organize next year to make sure I'm doing a lot more writing when I teach grammar?" (I-3, p. 7). The participants were fearful of sharing with other teachers in their own buildings because of differences in teaching philosophies, but if their colleagues from their own schools could hear the ideas the participants were expressing and try some of them, maybe everyone would understand that the gap is not as wide as it is perceived to be. These six teachers were hungry for that interaction, and other teachers may also be just as hungry.

Violet enjoyed the course and the camaraderie. She is still searching. She needs more resources to help her find answers. The professional learning course offered her direction for her search, "Now I'm on a quest. Now I know what I want, so I think it will be easier. Whereas, as I was just floating" (I-3, p. 3).

Mark was trying to find a path. He was a beginning teacher with many questions. Being in special education language arts, he was able to observe many different teachers' teaching styles. He currently is enrolled in a master's level program where he is using some of the ideas and research he heard in the professional learning course. The ideas of teaching grammar in context are new to him, but he has indicated that he is using them in

his classroom. “It just really forced me to think outside the box and how I teach grammar” (I-3, p. 7).

Molly, Jennifer, and Violet had all tried teaching grammar in context. Jennifer had her ideas clarified, Violet found direction, and Molly saw that her ideas would work in the classroom. Molly did not like teaching grammar, but she enjoyed sharing ways to make it more palatable to her and her students. She described the effect of the professional learning course as follows, “They’ve bolstered my sense that the teaching of grammar needs to be a more holistic process and not separate from teaching student writing” (I-3, p. 4).

The effects of the professional learning course on Emily were the most surprising. She had tried teaching grammar in context, but she did not feel that she had time to grade the papers, and she believed that teaching grammar traditionally was just as effective in some ways for teaching grammar. When I heard from her in August and she told me she was using the ideas we discussed in class, I wondered if she had changed some of her beliefs.

Implications

The teachers’ definitions in this study did not vary significantly from those reported in Weaver (1996) nor from other research (Hartwell, 1985; Noguchi, 1991; Schuster, 2003). The current study adds to the literature in that it confirms statements made by scholars such as Weaver, but it does so through formal research. The participants’ beliefs about teaching grammar were strongest in the areas of “correctness” of Standard American English (SAE), the power of SAE, and grammar as a tool for effective communication. It is difficult to separate the definitions of “correctness” from

the belief in the power of SAE because both deal with usage of Standard English. Jennifer, Mark, and Molly showed more awareness of dialectic differences in their responses than Melinda, Violet, and Emily, but none of the participants were aware of the research that shows that the grammars of other American dialects of English are equally rule-bound (Noguchi, 1991; Delpit, 1995). The value the participants place on SAE as a gatekeeper (Lyman & Figgens, 2005) is inherent in the ways the participants learned grammar: i.e., correction from parents, red ink on essays, and graded worksheets. In the cases of Mark and Melinda, they saw the effects of lack of the knowledge of Standard American English grammar in hiring and firing practices in businesses. Melinda felt the sting of dialectic markers when she moved from a rural area to an urban area in her home state. Because the participants believe so strongly in the "correctness" of SAE, their beliefs are a fit with public sentiments such as those expressed by Kent (2006) and the National Writing Commission Report (2005). As discussed previously, the beliefs of teachers are important to classroom instruction. This finding may indicate the continuation of beliefs about "correctness" of SAE in the students of these teachers. An implication here is that teachers and the public need to be made aware that while one dialect of English is accepted in various forms of communication, all dialects have complex systems of grammatical rules and are equally valuable. Another implication is that students must be taught writing in order to develop the skills that employers are seeking. The teaching of grammar in context would allow more time for writing instruction.

The participants closely linked effective communication to "correctness" and power. Schuster (2003) says that breaking the rules of school grammar does not "derail"

communication. Noguchi (1991) points out that one does not have to know the rules of grammar in order to communicate as a native speaker. Hartwell (1985) informs us that school grammar is not the real grammar of the language. Because the participants link "correctness" and power to communication, however, it is difficult for them to get past their drive to teach the rules of school grammar.

Even though the participants were adamant that school grammar must be taught, they had learned in college courses that it was best not to teach grammar traditionally. The findings in this study indicate the conflict that many teachers feel about teaching grammar in context. The problem the participants encountered when they began teaching was that they had difficulty finding lessons for teaching grammar in context. They had grammar books in their classrooms with ready-made traditional lessons. They all expressed a desire to have a textbook that contains innovative lessons that they can use everyday. Many good books are available today for teaching writing and for teaching grammar in context (i.e., Weaver's [1996] *Teaching Grammar in the Context of Writing*, Schuster's [2003] *Breaking the Rules*, Barry Lane's [1992] *After the End*, Ehrenworth and Vinton's [2005] *The Power of Grammar*), but there is no scope and sequence that follows the standards the teachers are required to teach. There are several implications here. The first is the internal conflict teachers feel between their beliefs about school grammar and what they learn in college. The second is conflict that teachers feel between what they were taught in college and what they encounter in the classroom (school grammar). The third is use of time. The teachers in this study have limited planning time, and some of them feel that they do not have time to read and utilize all of the supplemental materials that are available to them. In addition, the teachers report that

there is little formal time allotted for teachers to plan collaboratively in the same manner that they planned lessons together in the professional learning course.

The participants reported that they want materials that provide sound, helpful information on teaching grammar in context with a limited amount of reading and preparation. That is one reason that they find the Internet such a great asset. They reported that it is easy to scroll through the screen and pick what they want to read. The importance of the Internet should not be underestimated. Since the participants are accustomed to using the Internet and the World Wide Web, they suggested that a website, perhaps one from their own county school system, could provide lesson plans that followed their yearly course map. They were unaware of the new "ReadWriteThink" website published through a partnership of the National Council of Teachers of English and the International Reading Association (www.readwritethink.org). Because they are unaware of many of the professional websites that are available to them, they may use information for lesson plans from websites that do not employ the most current research. The implication here is that professional organizations such as NCTE should actively pursue middle school teachers and make them aware of the resources that they can provide.

Although the teachers in this study were willing to use innovative methods of teaching grammar, there were still problems that they encountered. First, using innovative methods increased the amount of time they needed to grade papers. That is a real problem for teachers. Their days are already full without adding additional time for grading papers. An implication here would be that teacher preparation courses could instruct future English language arts in ways to make grading of essays easier. A

constructivist model, such as the NWP model, where teachers practice methods would be a powerful way of assisting these teachers.

Another of the implications here is that some teacher preparation programs in colleges and universities are teaching their students to look for alternative methods in teaching grammar. The teachers in this study had heard the message that they should try different methods of teaching grammar and wanted to try. Willingness to try new innovative methods of teaching grammar is a good first step; however, there is still tension between the participants' beliefs that teaching traditionally is just as effective in some areas as teaching innovatively. Textbook manufacturers might take note that some teachers are requesting alternative textbooks. Additionally, while colleges and universities are getting the message across to try alternative methods, are colleges, universities, and state departments of education offering websites featuring innovative lesson plans to their preservice teachers and teachers? The National Council of Teachers of English and NCTE's Assembly for the Teaching of English Grammar offer information about teaching grammar in context, which would be a place to begin. Those in leadership positions in English language arts should take note of these teachers' needs for time to read and discuss resources and for particular forms of resources for innovative grammar instruction in context. Even though numerous professional books on this topic do exist, these teachers called for different types of resources that might be more readily available. NCTE's new study group kits, especially the "Professional Communities at Work: Grammar" resource kit, might offer a promising approach for this type of professional development. This kit, a collection of framing questions, suggested activities, and related resources (including a book, a collection of articles by teachers, and

online grammar resources), provides teachers with an opportunity to explore grammar through an inquiry-based model.

Another implication of this study is that the professional development model of the National Writing Project is effective in areas other than writing. Although this was a very brief professional learning course, all of the social practices observed by Lieberman and Wood (2003) were present with this group of teachers. Using this model to study grammar in a longer setting might be successful in changing attitudes and beliefs of veteran teachers who are reluctant to change from traditional teaching methods to more innovative ones. Violet said, “I think when traditional teachers change somewhat and keep the traditional that works and add the new stuff that works too and combine it and make something even stronger, that’s when the difference is made” (I-3, p.7). The teachers in this study were excited about sharing their ideas with each other. They came together with enthusiasm and were bursting with ideas, and they loved building on each other’s work. Even though they were slightly uneasy about preparing lessons in the beginning, as the class progressed, they realized that they were professionals who had valuable ideas that they could share in a non-threatening setting. Sharing ideas was important to them, and they called for their county technology department to set up a way for teachers to share innovative lesson plans. They suggested asking all the teachers in the county school system to share their best practices for publication either via Internet or on paper. They stressed that they liked the idea of “innovative” methods. Teachers need time to share, but in a typical school day, there is not enough time to complete the assigned tasks. Required professional development needs to change to allow teachers time and opportunity to communicate with others who teach the same subject in the way

these teachers came together. Becoming aware of the principles of the NWP model is a good place for those in leadership to begin.

Limitations

The size of this study was small, six participants; however, for a study which utilizes phenomenological interviewing as a primary data source, the size was appropriate. Another limitation was the selection of participants. In order to recruit participating teachers who were interested in discussing grammar, I offered a course on teaching grammar in the context of writing. By doing this, the study may have been limited to those teachers who were interested in both writing and grammar. It was necessary to have a purposeful sampling of teachers – those interested in grammar instruction – in order to do the study. The county offered the course to English language arts teachers who taught grades six through twelve, but only six European American middle school teachers chose to attend the course. Since all teachers were middle school teachers, this allowed for additional camaraderie within the group, but it may not have yielded as much diversity in ideas if high school teachers or teachers from other ethnicities had also been members of the learning community we created.

While interviews, field notes, researcher journal, and email responses from the participants offered a rich wealth of data, more data could have been added to the study through observations in the participating teachers' own classrooms. Following the participants' classroom practices for an entire year following the course could become another study.

Suggestions for Future Research

The central purpose of this study was to explore English language arts teachers' beliefs about grammar and the teaching of grammar because of the impact that teachers have on the enacted curriculum. Working with these six teachers was a good beginning; however, since the study included only six teachers who were interested in teaching grammar in innovative ways, follow-up studies could be done with larger numbers of teachers and wider ranges of teachers, including teachers from high schools and those from other racial and ethnic backgrounds. This would provide more breadth in terms of the big picture regarding the beliefs of language arts teachers about grammar and the teaching of grammar. Since traditional grammar is frequently taught in elementary school, studies need to be done about the beliefs about grammar and practices of elementary teachers. Other studies like the current one could be conducted in other school districts, such as urban districts or districts from other parts of the country. Also, surveys of English language arts teachers in county school systems, states, regions, or nations could provide a broader understanding of the state of teachers' beliefs about grammar and grammar instruction. We need to understand the beliefs of English language arts teachers in order to determine if the grammar research of the 1960s and 1980s has had any real or lasting effect on teaching practices. When I searched for research about the beliefs of English language arts teachers about grammar and the teaching of grammar, there were no studies about this particular area. The current study has only touched the surface. The teachers in this study wanted to share their ideas; they wanted to be heard. When I was seeking volunteers for this study, other English language arts teachers expressed interest in having their ideas shared with the academic

community but did not have time participate in the current study. Teacher educators, principals, school superintendents, and others who are in charge of curriculum should listen to the words of these teachers. These teachers want professional development, but they want their professional learning to be relevant to their teaching. They want to share with other English language arts teachers in professional learning communities.

Research has already been conducted on the effectiveness of the National Writing Project model and the teaching of writing. Could the effectiveness carry over into grammar if English language arts teachers were allowed to come together using this model? Jennifer said of the professional learning course, "They [the participants] all had valuable information, even the youngest who just got out of college" (I-3, p. 3). The short five-week course that I taught produced results that were similar to the NWP's summer institutes. The proposed courses could be longer and include more teachers with a wider range of perspectives and grade levels. Since the model was so effective with a small group of six, would it be effective with a larger group? Research into this area could offer insight into its effectiveness.

As stated above, one resource that the National Council of Teachers of English has developed for professional development in the area of grammar is a study group kit entitled "Professional Communities at Work: Grammar." This kit contains a guide for teaching grammar along with multiple professional articles on teaching grammar. The introductory letter addressed to educators in the kit says that NCTE believes that teachers accumulating knowledge of their teaching field can enhance their effectiveness in the classroom (NCTE, 2006). Study group resources such as these are another good starting point, but there is still a need for teachers to be given the time to participate in small

group discussions of teaching and learning without impinging on their personal time. Research into the effectiveness of using this type of resource for professional development would also shed light on the importance of teacher beliefs and knowledge and the extent to which teacher study groups on grammar contribute to teachers' knowledge and understandings of theory and research on grammar instruction as well as innovative approaches to teaching grammar.

Another implication of this study was the importance of standardized testing in the lives of teachers. The teachers in this study repeatedly referred to standardized tests and were fearful of changing teaching methods because they did not know the impact such a change would have on their students' test scores. While research is being conducted into the impact of standardized tests (McMillan, 2005; Franklin & Snow-Gerono, 2005;Mulvenon, Stegman, & Ritter, 2005), research should focus on the effectiveness of innovative methods of teaching grammar in relation to standardized test scores and student achievement.

One implication for further research focused on the importance of the Internet in the English language arts classroom. Two specific Internet usages were apparent: (1) The teachers in this study used the Internet to search for lesson plans for grammar and (2) Students use text messaging as a current means of communication (Carrington, 2005). Research into the types of teaching information about grammar that are available to English language arts teachers could access future needs in this area. Additional research into the effects of text messaging on student writing could help determine if it is a separate type of communication as Carrington (2005) says it is.

Summary

What are teachers' definitions and beliefs about grammar and the teaching of grammar? The six participants in this study defined grammar as rules that govern the functions of words in language, an effective communication tool, a "correct" way of using English, and a presence in all forms of literacy. They strongly believed that students gain power through a mastery of Standard American English, grammar instruction is necessary to bolster students' performance on standardized tests, and the best teaching methods for grammar may be found in a combination of both traditional methods and innovative methods.

These teachers learned grammar from their parents, from instruction in traditional ways in school, through reading, and especially through writing. They associated grammar with corrections to their writing. The grammar they teach in their classrooms comes from a variety of sources including the Internet, other teachers, books, and professional development classes. They enjoyed learning through the National Writing Project model of professional development, and all said that they would try the lessons they experienced during the five-week course. This study adds to the research by filling a gap on English language arts teachers' beliefs about grammar and the teaching of grammar.

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APPENDIXES

APPENDIX A

INTERVIEWS AND INTERVIEW QUESTIONS

This research utilized interview questions adapted from the work of Miller Cleary (1991) and Seidman (1998). A specific focus for each interview and specific questions included the following:

Interview I – What has grammar been like for you from the time you first remember until the present?

- What do you remember of grammar before you began school? How did you learn grammar?
- What was grammar like for you in elementary school? Middle school? High school?
- Do you remember ever learning grammar in the writing context?
- Did your parent(s) help you with grammar? How was that? Who else helped you with grammar (neighbors, grandparents, siblings, other relatives, peers)?
- When was the help useful? Was any of it upsetting?
- What kind of grammar did you hear or see your parents/siblings using in their speech and writing?
- When you think of grammar, what are the words you would associate with its meaning? Are there positive or negative connotations?
- Do you remember having an "ah-ha" moment when you felt that you knew grammar?
- Can you tell me about any positive or fun experiences with grammar?
- Can you tell me about any negative experiences with grammar?
- How was grammar defined by the people who taught grammar?

Interview II – What is grammar like for you right now?

- Tell me as many stories as you can about what grammar is like for you now.
- What are your experiences with grammar inside and outside of school?
- Tell me how grammar fits into a typical day, week, or unit at school.

- How do you teach grammar? Tell me as many ways as you can remember.
- Do you ever teach grammar in the context of writing? What is that like? How do your students respond?
- How do other people affect the way you teach grammar? Do you feel that you have to teach grammar in specific ways in order to meet curriculum guidelines for the county or state?
- Do other teachers, administrators, parents, or other individuals affect your teaching of grammar? How do these people affect your planning and teaching of grammar?
- The mention of the term grammar makes some people uneasy. Is that ever true for you? When? How?
- What makes grammar and the teaching of grammar easy for you? What gives you problems with grammar? What do you worry about?

Interview III – What sense do you make of your experiences with grammar?

- How do you understand your experiences with grammar inside and outside of school? What sense do you make of these experiences?
- How do your experiences with grammar affect your beliefs about grammar?
- How do you perceive your experiences with grammar? How do they affect the ways you teach grammar?
- Do you feel that your experiences with grammar are experiences you would like your students to experience? Why or why not?
- What things are important to you in your life as a teacher?
- Have the experiences we have had in class influenced your thinking about grammar? In what ways?
- Is there anything about grammar that I have not asked you that you want to discuss?
- How do *you* define grammar?
- Do you have any parting comments about grammar?

APPENDIX B

OPEN-ENDED QUESTIONNAIRE

Teachers and Grammar: A Study about Beliefs and Perceptions[1]

Name: _____Date: _____

Age: _____ Gender _____ Race or Ethnicity (optional): _____

Undergraduate Degree (Institution, Major, and Graduation Date):
_____

If your undergraduate degree was completed in an area other than English, at what institution(s) did you complete your required 24 hours of upper-division English courses?

_____

Have you had a university course in linguistics, grammar, or advanced grammar? _____

If so, name the course(s) and year completed: _____

_____

Directions: The purpose of this questionnaire is to help us learn about ideas and previous experiences concerning grammar and the teaching of grammar. Please reflect on each of the following questions, and answer each one by writing about your perspectives and stories in your own words. Keep in mind that we are simply interested in your experiences and perspectives on these issues; there are no right or wrong answers.

1. How do you define "grammar"? Can you give some examples that might help to explain or illustrate your definition?

2. How did you learn about "grammar? Where (e.g., school, home, etc.)? At what age(s)? In elementary, middle school, high school, and/or college? And from whom did you learn about "grammar" (e.g., parents, grandparents, or caregivers? teachers, administrators, or professors? church leaders? other relatives or

3. community members)? Any positive or negative memories of learn "grammar" stand out?

4. If you learned "grammar" in school, what do you remember about *how* were you taught (e.g., memorization of rules, practice exercises in texts, worksheets, in the context of your own or others' writing, etc.)? Describe any specific approaches that particular teacher or professors used that you can remember.

5. Did any of your teachers (elementary school through college) ever combine "grammar" and writing instruction? Did anyone ever connect the teaching of "grammar" to your own writing in some way? If yes, how?

6. Can you remember a time in school when you did not have "grammar" instruction? What grade(s)?

7. Have you ever used extra resources to assist you in "grammar"? If yes, what were these resources?

8. Please define the following terms (as they relate to grammar) in your own words. If you do not know the term, please do not look it up. Simply say, "I do not know the term."

    - Dialect
    - Language variety or variation
    - Vernacular
    - Regional English
    - Bidialectalism
    - Code-switching
    - Standard English
    - Language of power
    - Prescriptive grammar
    - Transformational grammar
    - Generative grammar

9. Do you have any language "pet peeves" or grammar and usage "pet peeves" (i.e., something related to written or spoken language that really bugs you or bothers you)? Please explain.

10. Do you feel like you know a little, a lot, or not enough about "grammar"? Please explain your response.

11. What do you believe might be the purpose(s) of teaching "grammar" in middle school and high school English language arts classrooms?

12. Please write any final thoughts about your ideas about and/or experiences with "grammar" or the teaching and learning of "grammar." Is there anything else you would like for me to know?

Thank you for completing this survey!

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[1] Note: This open-ended questionnaire was developed originally in collaboration with Dr. Dana L. Fox for use in the TEEMS English education program, an alternative M.Ed. degree program at Georgia State University that leads to initial teacher certification in secondary English language arts, grades 6-12.

APPENDIX C

Definitions of Grammar for "Teaching Grammar in the Context of Writing"

1. Syntax
2. Rhetoric
3. Prescriptive rules
4. Usage
5. Structure
6. Parts of Speech
7. Traditional grammar includes definitions of parts of speech and rules for using them in sentence construction. It is sometimes called "prescriptive" because it relies on rules to determine correct "usage" (Noguchi, 1991; Weaver, 1996; Mulroy, 2003; Schuster, 2003)
8. "The set of formal patterns in which the words of a language are arranged in order to convey larger meanings" (Hartwell)
9. "The branch of linguistic science which is concerned with the description, analysis, and formulization of formal language patterns" (Hartwell)
10. "linguistic etiquette" (Hartwell)
11. Grammar used in schools - Today, we would call this Academic English. (Hartwell)
12. Style and rhetoric (Hartwell)
13. The Assembly for the Teaching of English Grammar, a division of National Council of Teachers of English, (2004) says the following about grammar: "Grammar is important because it is the language that makes it possible for us to talk about language. Grammar names the types of words and word groups that make up sentences not only in English but in any language. As human beings, we can put sentences together even as children – we can all *do* grammar. But to be able to talk about how sentences are built, about the types of words and word groups that make up sentences – that is knowing about grammar" (p. 1).

14. Schuster (2003), like Hartwell, identifies multiple grammars: the system of rules used by native speakers, universally agreed upon usage rules, editing rules, and myth rules. Myth rules are the rules that drive many people to hatred for grammar. They are rules that grammarians have devised and accepted over a long period of time that sometimes do not fit the way language is used by native speakers or by the universally accepted rules. Schuster's "myth rules" are the source of many of the controversies in grammar.

APPENDIX D

Syllabus for "Teaching Grammar in the Context of Writing"

Teacher/Facilitator: Sue McClure
Contact Information: Archer Middle School – Middlefield School System

Textbooks (provided): *Teaching Grammar in Context* by Constance Weaver; *Grammar and the Teaching of Writing* by Rei Noguchi; *The Power of Grammar* By Ehrenworth and Vinton; *Breaking the Rules* by Edgar Schuster

This class is modeled on the National Writing Project in that all teachers/participants will share best practices in the teaching of grammar in context. You will leave this class with ideas and lessons that can be used in your classrooms. During the five weeks of this class, you will be asked to prepare and present grammar lessons based on ideas in the books provided for the class, as well as other resources you may have available to you. This class will be one (1) PLU.

Class Schedule

March 2 – Defining grammar; Introduction to research on grammar; Grammar lesson on sentence combining

March 9 – Sentence parts; Sentence fragments (Suggested readings: Noguchi pp. 46-60 and pp.84-92; Weaver pp. 190-214; Ehrenworth & Vinton pp. 61-64)
Presenters: _____
_____

March 16 – Run-ons; Comma Splices (Suggested readings: Noguchi pp. 64-81; Schuster pp. 110-119)
Presenters: _____
_____

March 23 – Usage (Suggested readings: Ehrenworth & Vinton pp. 58-60 and pp. 69-82; Schuster pp. 102-109 and pp. 124-135)
Presenters: _____
_____

March 30 – Punctuation (Suggested readings: Ehrenworth & Vinton pp. 58-60 and pp. 69-82; Schuster pp. 155-191; Weaver pp. 236-242)
Presenters: _____
_____

The following is expected in order to receive one (1) PLU: Attend all five sessions; read the assigned reading in the texts; prepare and present a grammar lesson with the class; participate in class discussions.